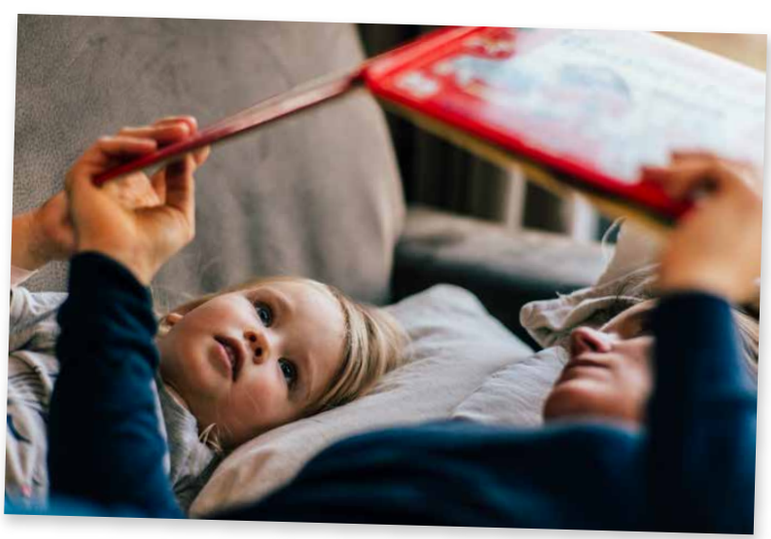
Supporting reading as your child grows

Ages 0–5 Ages 5–11 Ages 11+

Reading changes as children grow, but one thing stays the same: it works best when it starts with what they love.

Whether it's board books, chapter books, comics, football programmes, recipes, podcasts or song lyrics, reading isn't just about the words and turning the pages. It's about curiosity, conversation and discovering more about the things that matter to them.

Here's how you can help at every stage.



Ages 0–5:
Every moment is a reading moment

For babies and young children, reading is about shared moments. It's the cuddle before bed, singing the same rhyme for the hundredth time, chatting about the dog you pass on the way to the shops, or pointing out the bright red bus.

You don't need to wait until they're old enough to read a book.

It starts earlier than you think

Babies begin recognising familiar voices before they're even born. Reading, talking or singing during pregnancy helps create those first shared moments, and hearing the same stories or songs after birth can be comforting and familiar.

Reading isn't always a book

You're probably already building your child's reading skills
every day.

Try:

- Talking about what you can see together.
- Looking at family photos, magazines or picture books.

- Singing favourite songs and nursery rhymes.
- Listening to stories or audiobooks.
- Spotting signs, labels and packaging when you're out.
- Making up stories during play.
- Naming everyday objects, food, clothes and body parts.

It all counts.

Follow their interests

Children learn best when they're interested.

Love dinosaurs? Find dinosaur books.

Obsessed with diggers? Tell stories about building sites.

Can't stop talking about bugs? Go on a minibeast hunt after reading a story together.

Start with what fascinates them and reading becomes something they'll want to do.

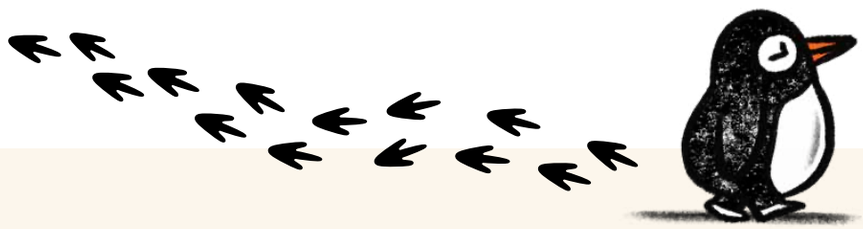
You don't need to be a perfect storyteller

You don't need funny voices or to finish every book.

Talking, singing, listening, looking at pictures or telling stories in the language you speak at home all help build a love of reading.

Your time and attention matter more than perfect words.

Find out more about supporting 0–5s: https://goallin.org.uk/families-0-5/



Ages 5–11:
Build reading around what they love

These are the years children learn to read – but they're also the years they discover what they enjoy reading.

School teaches children how reading works. Teachers support them to build skills like phonics, fluency and understanding, giving a strong foundation. At home, reading can be more relaxed and helps children explore their interests and enjoy stories in their own way. And the shared involvement in a story, exploring different worlds together, even enjoying old favourites from their toddler days, will help you connect.

Reading doesn't have to look a certain way

Books are brilliant, but they're only part of the picture.

Reading also includes:

- Comics and graphic novels
- Magazines
- Audiobooks
- Song lyrics
- Recipes
- Fact books
- Sports reports
- Instructions and game guides

If they're reading, they're reading.

Start with their passions

During the primary school years, children's passions explode. Football. Animals. Space. Dance. Minecraft. Taylor Swift.

Whatever they're into, there's something to read that helps them explore it even further.

Children are much more likely to read when it feels connected to the things they already enjoy.

Keep it easy

Children's interests change fast - and that's okay.

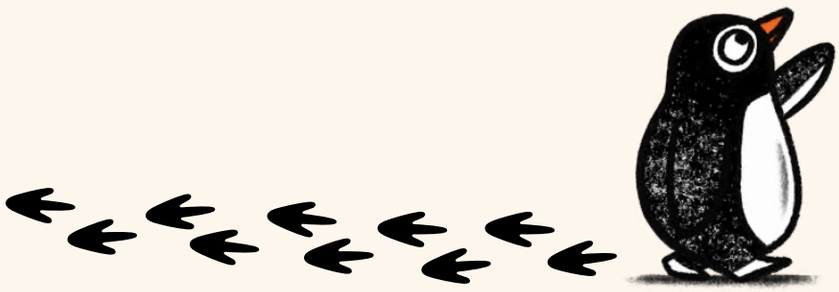
Libraries are packed with free books, e-books, audiobooks and activities. Schools, Family Hubs and community book swaps are great places to discover something new without needing to buy to support every new passion.

You don't need all the answers

If reading isn't something you feel confident with, you're not alone. And you don't have to be a confident reader to support your child to enjoy reading.

Listening to audiobooks together, chatting about pictures or sharing stories in any format all help build positive reading habits.

Find out more about supporting 5–11s: https://goallin.org.uk/families-5-11/



Ages 11+:
Keep reading connected to real life

As children become teenagers, reading often starts to feel like schoolwork.

Homework increases, interests change and life gets busier.

The key isn't making them read more, it's helping them find things worth reading.

Reading is bigger than books

Teenagers read every day, even if it doesn't always look like it.

Think:

- Podcasts and interviews
- Graphic novels and comics
- Blogs and reviews
- Song lyrics
- Sports analysis
- Fan fiction
- Articles
- E-books and audiobooks
- Magazines

It all builds reading confidence

Reading can be a place to pause

The teenage years can be exciting, challenging and sometimes overwhelming.

Reading won't solve every problem, but many young people find stories help them switch off, slow down, escape for a while or feel understood.

Sometimes that's exactly what's needed.

It doesn't have to cost anything

Libraries offer free books, audiobooks, magazines and digital content that teenagers can access independently, making it easier for them to discover something that genuinely interests them.

Find out more about supporting 11+ readers: https://goallin.org.uk/families-11-plus/.

Every child is different.
Every reading journey is too.

There’s no perfect way to encourage reading.

The best place to start is with your child—their interests, their questions and the things they already love. Because when reading feels relevant, it becomes something they’ll choose, not something they have to do.

GO ALL IN.

National Year of Reading 2026