



Reading Buddies

Volunteer's Handbook

Building confidence and skills in reading for 6 to 11 year olds

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Purpose of the programme

The old adage that 'practice makes perfect' is true of any activity, but it's also true that most people will make more progress, more rapidly, if there's someone there to encourage and help them.

This is the foundation of the Reading Buddies programme.

To help primary school children aged between 6 and 11 (Key Stage 1 and 2 in the National Curriculum) improve literacy skills by giving them time to practice their reading on a one to one basis with a volunteer adult.

That doesn't mean you are substituting for the role of teacher or parent. Rather that you are complementing both of them through your time, life experiences and objectivity.

What makes a good Reading Buddy?

If you relate well to children, care about their education, are a good listener, have patience and are willing to commit one lunch hour of your time per week on a regular basis, you already have what it takes.

There is no single right way to teach reading; nor do all children learn in the same way. It's because children's needs are so varied that the Reading Buddies programme can make such a difference.

For most children aged between 7 and 11, their only real experience of personal relationships with adults will have been with family members and their teachers.

Demonstrating that an adult who is unconnected to family or formal teaching is interested in them and their learning, within the safe environment of school, can give a huge boost to a child's confidence and self-esteem, quite apart from the benefits of reading practice.

You will also be helping to develop your Buddy's communication skills by engaging in real conversations together, not just about the books you are reading, but also sharing information as your friendship grows.

It will be your time and commitment that counts, but following the simple techniques and guidelines of this programme will help you to build a positive relationship with your Buddy, based on shared enjoyment.

Naturally, all volunteers who will work with children must undergo a DBS check before commencement.

Meeting your new Buddy



When you first meet your new Buddy, the initial session will be as much about getting to know each other as actual reading.

The co-ordinator may already have been able to tell you about your child, their reading ability and the areas in which support is needed.

Introductions

Remember that in school, children may be expected to address adults formally by title and surname. You should follow whatever convention is in place when introducing yourself and in the future sessions with your Buddy.

Sharing information

Finding out a little about each other will help you and your Buddy to feel more comfortable together and make it easier to establish your relationship.

Asking some simple questions about any brothers and sisters, favourite lessons at school and what they enjoy doing outside of school time will demonstrate your interest and give you a good start towards building a rapport.

Based on what you will have learned about your Buddy, tell them a bit about yourself at their age, particularly relating your experiences to theirs, so they can see that even though you are an adult, there is common ground.

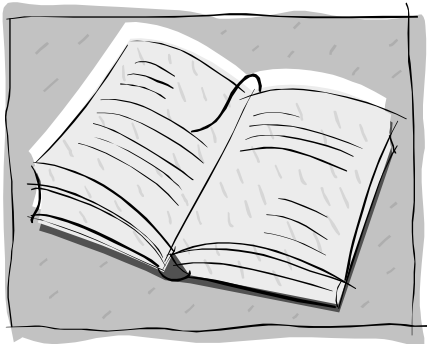
Setting the scene

Explain that you are not a teacher but you are very interested in reading and are looking forward to hearing your Buddy reading their own school books.

Try to find out about the kind of stories your Buddy really likes and ask what they particularly enjoy about that type of story.

For your first session at least, encourage your Buddy to choose a book they are already familiar with so they will be at ease when reading to you.

The first reading session



Make sure that you and your Buddy are sitting side by side in a quiet area with as few distracting views or happenings as possible.

Ideally your Buddy will already know the book they have chosen reasonably well, so encourage them to talk about it before starting to read.

How to begin

Ask them to show you their book and see if they can tell you who the characters are in each of the pictures and what is happening.

Find out how much of the book your Buddy would like to read in this session. Remember that although you are there to give encouragement, it's important that the child should not feel under pressure while you are still getting to know each other.

Interested listening

Allow your Buddy to read at his or her own pace and show your interest in the story through your expression and appropriate comments about the events unfolding.

Mistakes

In your first session, if a child gets to a word they don't know, tell them instantly. The important thing is to build confidence and put the child at their ease. Discuss the kinds of stories they remember or enjoy.

Ask them how they are taught to tackle unknown words and ask what sort of help they would like from you. Explain that you will help a lot to begin with, but that you will also show them ways to help themselves.

Compliments

Always find something to praise and don't hesitate to give compliments as often as possible. Tell your Buddy how much you have enjoyed meeting them and hearing them read and that you are looking forward to your next session together.

Developing the Partnership



Although some aspects of your relationship will be governed by your Buddy's age and reading ability, the basic principles will be the same for all children.

The key is to establish a routine for your sessions together so you both know what to expect, and stick to it as far as possible.

If you know in advance you will have to miss a session, make sure you let your Buddy know you can't be there and explain why.

Exchanging news

Finding out what has been happening in your Buddy's life, either in or out of school since you last met, and telling them about something you have done is a good way to start each session.

However, set a time limit on the initial chat before beginning to read. If there's lots to tell you can always carry on by taking a break in the reading later.

Choosing the books

The books that your Buddy will be reading to you may be either:

- part of a Reading Scheme (specifically designed for a systematic approach to sentence structure and vocabulary and graded to reading level) or;
- free choice, where the content may be fact or fiction, for pure enjoyment or to provide information.

Previewing a book

Check whether your Buddy is familiar with the chosen book. Children may want to stick to books they know and like, especially if they are younger or at a lower level of reading ability. It's OK to go with that until you feel they have enough confidence for you to suggest trying something different.

If the book is new, or fairly new to the child, go through it together encouraging them to talk about what is happening in the pictures so they will have an idea of what the story is about before starting to read. Tell them proper [people's] names in advance. You can do this with technical words in non-fiction too.

Note any words which may prove difficult and ask the child to locate them in the text and talk about what they mean..

Gaining Confidence

Reading together

Depending on your Buddy's age, level of reading ability and their familiarity with the book, it may be a good idea to initially read it together.

If the child is reasonably confident, get them to track the print (point to the words as they say them) and make sure you are reading at their pace. Otherwise, track the print yourself or hold a piece of blank paper under that line, but ensure your Buddy is able to keep up. In either case, take some time to talk about any words that were a particular problem for them.

The child reads alone

In all sessions, find out how much your Buddy would like to read before they start. If they manage their initial selection easily, you can always encourage them to do a little more if they are willing to.

Give them the time and opportunity to tackle words they haven't encountered before, or which cause difficulty. You will find some tips on how you might help in the next section.

Ensure you are demonstrating 'interested listening' even if it's the second or third time you have heard the same book!

Reviewing the book

Unless this has been a repeat reading, discuss what has happened in the story.

There should be plenty of opportunities to increase your Buddy's involvement and interest by asking for their opinion on what the main characters were doing. What was good or bad about what someone did? How might somebody have done something differently? Has anything similar happened to you?etc.

If only part of the book has been read, also ask what your Buddy thinks might happen next. You might also review any new or problem words that were encountered and check that they have been understood and remembered.

Giving praise

Always find something you are able to praise in every session, both during the reading – making a good effort at new words etc. - and as reinforcement before you leave.

Helping with reading



Children are taught a variety of strategies to work out words they cannot read instantly. That makes for effective learning.

We've outlined those used most commonly in the classroom so that you can help your Buddy in ways they should be familiar with.

You should be made aware of the main strategies in use at your introductory visit or by a colleague.

Phonics

The sounds of letters and letter combinations are the building blocks for decoding a word. Since September 2006, all schools have been legally required to use 'synthetic phonics' for teaching 4 and 5 year olds. That means the sound of each letter or combination of letters is pronounced in isolation and blended together to create the word.

However, because of the peculiarities of the English language, that doesn't work for every word so other strategies are needed, mainly based on context – what word would make sense in relation to the rest of the sentence? See addendum for more information on Phonics

Re-reading

If the child reads a word incorrectly, do not say anything until the end of the sentence. He/she may well hear that the sentence doesn't make sense and re-read it him/herself. In the event that they don't hear the mistake, ask whether that made sense and suggest reading the sentence again.

Should there still be a problem highlight the word and provided it is likely to be within the child's experience, see whether they can work it out by sounding the letters. If it's too difficult for them, read it yourself and discuss the meaning.

Reading on

If the child gets stuck on a word and can't work it out by sounding the letters, leave it out and ask them to read on to the end of the sentence. Ask them to go back and re-read the whole sentence because the context plus the initial letters may well be enough to identify the word.

As previously, if the word is too difficult, read it yourself and discuss the meaning.

Understanding

A lack of vocabulary can prevent many an emerging reader from becoming confident and fluent. It is really important to encourage your child to tell you any words whose meaning is not known. Collect a few new words each week and practise them in several contexts.

Discuss what has happened to make sure the child is hearing what s/he is reading and not just saying each word in isolation. Read a section yourself and encourage the child to imagine the scene. With older children, both read a page silently, then ask each other questions about it.

Punctuation

Sometimes a child may simply read on and on without taking any notice of punctuation.

That's often because he or she is concentrating on reading the individual words without listening to what they are saying – missing the context.

Ask “Did that make sense?” Make sure, again that there is understanding of the words. Read it yourself as they did, to see if they can hear the error. Read a sentence each for a paragraph or two or make up a full-stop signal – a click of the fingers or a tap on the table.

Lack of Engagement

Generally children are only too thrilled to read with you, but sometimes they may seem not to engage. If your child brings the same book every week, s/he may lack either interest or confidence. Find a book yourself and read to your child. Discuss what kinds of stories or information they might enjoy and seek them out. However, children do re-read books ‘for remembered pleasure’ and it does help build confidence and fluency.

If the child appears bored or disinterested, the material may be too difficult or too easy. Spend some time chatting about interests and what makes them laugh or gets them excited. Seek out some jokes or information to bring in or read some story beginnings to whet appetites.

If a child doesn't want to read at all, there may be a fear of failure. Find books with plenty of pictures and work out the story by talking about what you can see. You can be encouraging by reading the parts that back up their ideas. Patience and flexibility will help to build confidence.

Keep at it, the one to one attention your child is getting is invaluable and you will be making a difference.

Summary of key points

Here's a brief summary to serve as an aide memoire and help you get started in building a successful and satisfying reading partnership.

- Your friendship and interest are as important as the reading
- If they display signs of sadness or fatigue, make it a prompt to ask them if they're okay today.
- Establish a routine for your sessions and try to stick to it
- Preview a new book together before starting to read
- Let your Buddy know it's okay to make mistakes
- Encourage them to find their own solutions if they can



- Review what you have done together after each session
- Give praise at every opportunity
- Always have some tissues handy
- If you feel the relationship isn't working, inform your co-ordinator and discuss what steps can be taken.

Phonics

Children are taught the 26 letters and their sounds and names and then move on to learn the 44 phonemes and the 140 combinations of letters from 'th' to 'ough'.

There are many rules and there are many, many rule-breakers which is why learning to read English is more difficult than learning to read Spanish – or Welsh.

- Consonants and consonant blends (pl, spr etc.) need to be articulated without an 'uh'. 'D – o – g', not duh – o – guh.
- C, G and Y have several pronunciations – cat, face, circus, accident – gap, gym, gorge – yacht, my, Egypt, funny.
- If they cause difficulties, make a collection and put them into groups that sound alike. Look for ways to remember them.
- Vowels have the five basic sounds as in fan, fen, fin, on, fun.
- A modifying final 'e' (magic 'e' in oldspak) makes the vowel 'say its name' – game, scene, pile, bone, use. (Exceptions – one, once, gone, come, was etc., etc.)
- Vowel combinations, such as ai, ea, ou, ie etc., make different sounds in different words – fail/said, leaf/deaf, would/wound/ wound, thief/tries etc..
- It is important not to get 'bogged down' in phonics; context can help greatly.

Pronunciation

Collect groups of words that look and sound the same, for instance.

soup, wound, group out, cloud, sound, foul, aloud
fool, food, troop, crown, fowl, growl, brown
foot, soot own, flow, crow, grow,

Make up sentences to include like spellings:

I eat my meat on the seat for a treat. It's great!

I greet my friends when we meet in the street.

Further Reading

For good common sense advice try - Paul Jennings' 'The Reading Bug'

Quite Interesting Stuff to Google:

Philip Pullman – 'Moonshine and Magic'

Henry Porter – 'Pity Dictionary'

Rita Carter – 'Science revolution dyslexia'

The National Curriculum

Pupils in state schools aged 5-16 must be taught the National Curriculum. This is divided in to four key stages.

Every school has National Curriculum documents for each subject. These documents describe what is being taught at each key stage. English is divided into three areas of learning: speaking and listening; reading and writing.

Age	Stage	Year	Tests
3-4	Foundation	Nursery	
4-5		Nursery/Reception	Baseline
5-6	Key Stage 1	Yr 1	
6-7		Yr 2	Assessment
7-8	Key Stage 2	Yr 3	
8-9		Yr 4	
9-10		Yr 5	
10-11		Yr 6	SATs – English/Maths/Science
11-12	Key Stage 3	Yr 7	
12-13		Yr 8	
13-14		Yr 9	
14-15	Key Stage 4	Yr 10	
15-16		Yr 11	GCSEs etc

Levels of achievement

In most cases the National Curriculum sets standards of achievement in each subject for pupils aged 5-14.

Literacy

Currently around 20% of 11 year olds fall short of the standard expectation for their age group in English.

ABLAZE has committed its volunteers to raising standards in primary literacy i.e. investment in Key Stages 1 & 2. Success will be measured by an improvement in results. against national targets.

Before you start

Before you begin working with a Buddy, you will have a familiarisation meeting with your partner-school's Head Teacher and/or the appropriate Class Teacher.

This will be your opportunity to find out more about the school, the child you will be working with and of course, to ask questions.

You should also have a tour of the premises, an explanation of the security and emergency procedures and a copy of the school's Child Protection policy (See Addendum) and name of the school's designated Child Protection person.

Here are a few Do's and Don'ts for you to bear in mind when you begin working in the programme.

DO

- ✓ carry or wear required identification at all times
- ✓ sign in according to the school's systems on each visit
- ✓ work in an open area or with the door open
- ✓ give feedback to the Class Teacher and your fellow volunteers
- ✓ try to let the school know if you cannot attend a session unexpectedly

DON'T

- ✗ give gifts or sweets, but do send a postcard via school if on holiday
- ✗ initiate any physical contact with the child – sit side by side
- ✗ attempt to enforce discipline – advise the teacher of any problems
- ✗ Photograph the child
- ✗ Allow yourself to be drawn into inappropriate attention-seeking behaviour such as tantrums or crushes

You and your Buddy will be taking part in the programme because you want to and it should be an enjoyable experience for both of you. If something isn't working for either of you, don't hesitate to talk to your co-ordinator who can notify the partner school co-ordinator.

Child Protection

There are two important considerations when working one-to-one with a child, their well being and your own protection.

Before you start work to work with the school, you should ideally have a copy of their Child Protection policy and in some schools they have a Touch Policy too. Do ask for this on your first visit.

Part of the guidance that is issued by the Department for Education and Skills requires each school to:

- Ensure they have a designated senior person for child protection who has received appropriate training and support for this role, usually the head teacher.
- Ensure every member of staff (including temporary and supply staff and volunteers) and governing body knows the name of the designated senior person responsible for child protection and their role.
- Ensure all staff and volunteers understand their responsibilities in being alert to the signs of abuse and responsibility for referring any concerns to the designated senior person responsible for child protection.

If you have any concerns that a child may be being abused or discloses inappropriate information to you.

Do

- ✓ Listen carefully with an open mind, allow the child to talk
- ✓ Stay calm, don't transmit shock, anger or disbelief
- ✓ Tell the child that they have done the right thing by telling you
- ✓ Make accurate notes using the child's words
- ✓ Inform the designated person for child protection

Don't

- ✗ Ask leading questions.
- ✗ Use your own words to describe events
- ✗ Investigate or question – even to clarify
- ✗ Promise confidentiality

Make sure you know the name and contact details of the designated child protection person in the school and inform them immediately if you have any concerns. They will take over.

You may feel awkward about reporting a case, but it is your responsibility to do so. Your knowledge of the child and accurate re-telling of the disclosure will be a valuable aid.