



Using books with older children and teenagers

The reading journey

From the moment we show children their first book, they begin a reading journey which continues through their teenage years until they become adults. The time from the age of eight through to the teenage period is an exciting one. Children are developing their sense of identity. Reading can be an essential support to them at this time. It can give information, help children form their own feelings, and explain the behaviour of others. At the same time it lets them join a community of readers around the world – and reading in English opens up one of the largest reading communities of all.

Choosing the best books

Thousands of books are published each year in the UK. Here are some ways you can help your child choose good-quality books.

- Ask for advice from your child's teachers.
- Ask staff for advice in bookshops and libraries.
- Visit websites such as [BookTrust](#) or [The Guardian's children's books site](#). □ Read review magazines such as [Books for Keeps](#).
- Look for shortlists and winners of children's book prizes such as the [CILIP Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Awards](#).

Sharing stories

Even after children learn to read themselves, they continue to enjoy reading with a parent. It is important to share stories with your older child, to help them develop the language and confidence to talk about the books they read.

The child as a reader

Children aged between eight and eleven often choose to read fiction. Many prefer one or two favourite types of fiction or a single author. It is important to respect children's reading choices and value what they choose to read. Bookshops, websites, etc. can provide advice ('If you like that, you may also like this book.')

In time, children will read different genres and authors.

It is important to have a variety of books available (non-fiction, short stories, illustrated biographies, modern poetry, simple play scripts). Teenagers often alternate between reading adult and children's books.



Issues and controversies in children's books

Contemporary novels for teenagers reflect today's society, and often mention topics such as sex, drugs and race. This is usually done sensitively, but the book could still offend in certain cultures; seek advice if you are unsure. Sometimes there is strong language or swearing. Use these books as an opportunity to talk about the issues and to discuss the 'rights and wrongs' of subjects with your teenager.

Illustrations

Illustrations in books for older children support understanding of the text and help in the learning of English. Pictures can show objects or scenes that may be hard to describe without using complex language and add additional information not described in the text. Speech balloons, captions and exclamations are good ways to introduce idiomatic English and colloquial language. Illustrated books help a parent with little or no English to share stories with an English learner by following the story through the pictures.

Boys' reading

Boys often read for pleasure less than girls. Here are some ways to encourage boys to read.

- Talk to boys about the kind of books they like.
- Show them a wide variety of materials, including non-fiction, books of jokes, poems and 'fun facts'.
- Identify the fiction genres that are popular, e.g. fantasy, science fiction and sports stories.
- Use graphic novels, manga material and other illustrated books.
- Identify male role models, including peers and celebrities, to promote reading.
- Use online materials to encourage boys to read.

Online materials

There are many websites that feature books and reading, and these can be used to motivate children to read, and to extend their reading. They can also allow children to join the worldwide community of readers in English, and encourage children to send emails to authors, write reviews, etc. You will find many websites about books and reading in the [websites section](#) on LearnEnglish Kids.



The role of parents

When children are very young, their books are mainly chosen by adults. As children get older, parents can advise, but it is important to let the child develop their own reading tastes. Parents must be sensitive to when their advice will be helpful, and when they need to let children make their own choices. It can still be useful for parents to introduce new books, perhaps by reading the first page or two and then leaving their child to continue alone. Children may enjoy reading a few pages to their parents and can be encouraged to talk about what they've been reading.

Even though children may prefer to read for themselves, parents can be supportive by showing an interest in their children's reading. Try questions such as: 'What are you reading at the moment?', 'Are you enjoying it?', 'Have you read any more by that author?', and 'Do you think I'd like it?' Remember to respect their own choice of reading, even if it seems 'too easy' or not an author that you would choose for them yourself. Praise children about their reading whenever you can. 'Well done, you've finished the whole chapter' is much better than 'You're not going out to play until you've finished that chapter'. If you're worried about your child's reading, talk first to their teacher, or the local librarian, about your concerns.

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