

Reading areas

Develop an irresistible book area and build the foundations of a life- long love of reading

Create book friendly spaces that maximise deep levels of engagement, where children are drawn in to pick up books, listen to and share stories. A place that children never want to leave...

No matter the size of the environment, every setting should have an enticing space dedicated to books and stories both inside and outside. A space that builds on children's interests and developmental needs. A space small enough to feel cosy and even secretive and a space big enough for an adult to join in the fun.

What children need

- Exposure to stories, lots of stories and some more stories
- Hear books with repetitive rhymes, alliteration over and over again
- Sing nursery rhymes and action songs daily
- Listen to stories read by passionate adults who bring stories and characters alive through animated voices, puppets and props. Where adult's use a squeaky voice for a mouse and a deep, loud voice for a giant.
- Daily opportunities to retell familiar stories independently
- A quiet, comfortable, cosy space to sit and explore books alone, with friends or with an adult
- Hear language used in books as it is different to everyday talk.



Top Tips on creating successful reading spaces

Remember a book area cannot be considered a book area if it is combined with another area. It can however be a portable space with a box of books and a couple of camping chairs.

- Locate in a quieter area of the setting
- Create secret, enclosed spaces by using a pop up tent, teepee, wicker arch, a table draped with a cloth and cushions underneath or a dog basket padded with a blanket and cushions
- Add real large plants, cushions, rugs or fake grass, blankets that can be easily cleaned. Make it cosy.
- Vary the seating options – toad stalls, bean bags, log, crates, small sofa. Can the children move the seating around to change the seating arrangements?
- Make links to children's interests, engage with their curiosity by creating a dinosaur reading den, a flower garden or perhaps the Gruffalo's forest.
- Consider how books will be displayed. Books need to be accessible to all children. Use wire frames, floor based book boxes, baskets, low shelving which allows the front of the book to be clearly displayed.
- Outside books should include favourite stories, information books about the natural world, transport or construction. Include a selection of books in the playhouse, role play area and mud kitchen.
- Books should not be limited to the book area. Consider baskets or boxes of books strategically placed throughout the setting e.g. home corner or in the mud kitchen. This will encourage children who do not choose to go into the reading space to look at books and include books in their play.

Resources

- Offer a wide selection of good quality books, fiction and non-fiction hard and paper back, flap books, cloth books, pop-up books, books made by your children, magazines, catalogues, recipe books, recorded stories.
- Story props (objects), puppets, story sacks, picture cards. For example, if The Three Little Pigs is book of the week provide small world pigs, small bricks, sticks and straw and some information books on pigs and wolves.
- Create story puppets by using characters from the story (drawn or printed), laminate and attach to lolly sticks or make sock puppets.
- Change books regularly to maintain interest and support topics.
- Create homemade books using photographs of the children and people close to them
- Add a puppet theatre. This could be made from a large cardboard box with the children

Book loving displays

Develop displays that says to the children and their families 'we love books' and displays that stimulates conversation through the use of photographs, eye catching images (A4 size) of favourite book covers, characters and repeated refrains such as 'Run, run as fast you can, you can't catch me...' Children relish looking at themselves in photographs. Cover the display board, at child height in their image, looking at books, sharing books, listening to stories, playing with puppets at home and in the setting. Add a mirror to they can watch themselves tell a story. Create 'our favourite books' display or 'books we love reading'. Include photographs of all staff and family members with their favourite book. Add speech bubbles quoting what children say about their favourite stories.



Role of the adult

- Be excited about books
- Invite children to choose a book
- Provide opportunities to make predictions. Introduce a story looking at the picture on the front cover and ask 'what can you see? 'What do you think the story will be about?' Wonder with the children 'What do you think will happen next?'
- Pause to let children fill in the missing word (predicting words, rhythms) 'Oh help, oh no, it's a
- Draw attention to key phrases and words before reading. For example, 'In this story there is a wolf who says 'Little pig, Little pig.... Let's practice saying that so we can sound like the wolf'.
- Use visual aids – puppets and props. Does each child have a prop to hold?
- Use an animated voice with lots of expression, facial expression and gesture
- Use actions and encourage children to use actions
- Repeat phrases chorally, invite children to join in
- Keep it active – providing opportunities for children of all ages to move their bodies e.g. climb up the bean stalk, tip toe through the forest
- Demonstrate how to use information books. E.g. we are going to make play dough, let's look at the recipe and instructions in this book to show us what to do'.

Reflecting on your book area

Stand back and watch children in your provision. Are they engaging with books and story-telling? What else could you be doing? How many stories do you or your team share in a day, a week, a month? What if these children are not having stories read to them at home?

You will know if your book area is successful when you stand back and spy a child quietly flicking through a book, or 'reading' a familiar story to puppets, dolls or teddies, see groups of children are repeating songs, stories and story actions they have enjoyed with adults.