



Bookbug evidence review

A summary of research on sharing songs, stories and rhymes in early years

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Sharing stories, songs and rhymes with babies and young children has many benefits including supporting children's language, learning and social skills.

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An evidence-led programme

'The Bookbug programme is based on findings from a range of studies that a significant amount of literacy learning takes place before (and around) formal schooling, and that the home environment can powerfully influence a child's experiences of more formal learning.' (Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, 2017)

Sharing stories, songs and rhymes from an early age strengthens family relationships and helps children develop skills that will set them up for life. Through book gifting, Bookbug Sessions, targeted outreach work with partnership organisations and digital support through the Bookbug app and website, Bookbug aims to ensure all children in Scotland have access to high-quality songs, stories and rhymes.

This document summarises some of the research that demonstrates that early engagement with literacy activities fosters positive outcomes, both immediately and later in life.

Stories, songs and rhymes in every home

Bookbug gifts books to every child in Scotland at key stages of their development because research shows that early access to books gives children the best start in life.

Children with regular access to books benefit from increased opportunities to enjoy stories from an early age. Songs, rhymes and stories also help children to develop the skills they need to flourish later in life:

- 'A positive association was found between a child's main carer having received and used the initial Bookbug pack [bag] and the child having better expressive vocabulary at age 3, also when other factors were controlled for.' (Growing Up in Scotland, 2016)
- 'The shared experience of rhyming and singing helps to prepare children to play cooperatively with others, and some of the material also creatively presents them with rules to follow. And, importantly, language play contributes to children's emotional development.' (Mullen, 2017).
- 'The value of book sharing is attributed to the dedicated interaction it prompts between children and parents; the use of more complex language in books compared to everyday conversations; and the ability to reinforce new knowledge through repetition'. (Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, 2017).

Introducing songs, stories and rhymes

Through [bag gifting](#), [Bookbug Sessions](#), and the [Bookbug app](#), Bookbug promotes songs, stories, and rhymes. Research demonstrates that these are essential tools for a child's development.

An array of studies have concluded that children benefited from hearing nursery rhymes from an early age. Preschool children (with and without additional support needs) who were familiar with stories, songs, and rhymes developed better literacy, cognitive, and motor skills:

- 'Nursery rhyme experiences, awareness, and knowledge were found to be positively related to accomplishment in early phonological and print-related skills.' (Dunst et al., 2011)
- 'The brain develops faster than any other time between the ages of zero and three. Because of this, it's important to foster literacy during the early stages of life. If children are not stimulated, if they're not read to, if they're not engaged, if they're not asked questions, their brains actually atrophy.' (Phalen, 2011 qtd in Bridges, 2013).
- 'When children physically participate in the actions, they practise their motor skills and hand-eye coordination. The content within the rhymes and songs introduces children to words, numbers, and concepts, aiding their language and cognitive development. Through simple stories woven into the rhymes, children become familiar with narrative elements and they also gain knowledge about their world.' (Mullen, 2017).

Building relationships

Bookbug supports the development of close and nurturing relationships by encouraging families to sing, read, talk and rhyme with babies and young children.

Spending time sharing a simple rhyme or cuddling up for a story can have a positive impact on attachment:

- 'Our results suggest that shared book reading with infants should be presented as predominantly a social activity, that is to say to be perceived as a warm one-to-one activity, and tailored to what parents and children enjoy.' (Kucirkova, 2018)
- 'Arts and shared reading activities have also been found to improve parent-child relationships as children grow up, including the perceived acceptance of a child by its mother and both parental and child psychosocial functioning.' (WHO, 2018)
- "Children's abilities to develop aspects of emotional maturity are dependent on how they are treated by the adults who take care of them. Language play fosters attachment and, by extension, positive feelings" (Mullen, 2017)
- "Singing led to significantly greater increases in mother-infant bonding and positive affect than the control condition alongside significantly greater reductions in negative affect and anxiety" (Fancourt, 2017)

Getting the best start in life

Bookbug is underpinned by research that suggests a child's performance in school is related to their early experiences of listening to their mums, dads and carers.

Early enjoyment of, and access to, stories, songs and rhymes are associated with above average vocabulary and academic attainment:

- 'Children's academic successes at ages nine and ten are attributable to the amount of talk they hear from birth to age three.' (Bridges, 2013).

- 'Children who read daily are more likely to have above average vocabulary attainment than children who read less often (19.6% vs. 12.0%); children who enjoy stories “a lot” are also more likely to have above average vocabulary attainment than children who enjoy stories less (17.1% vs. 11.6%).' (Fornby, 2014).
- 'Children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefitted more from book reading interventions than children from mixed backgrounds in terms of the impact intervention had on their receptive language development.' (Law et al., 2018)
- 'Three-plus decades of research have detailed the benefits of reading aloud to children. Educators, pediatricians, and policymakers alike recognize the immense advantages for those children who enter school thoroughly immersed in the rich, inventive language of picture books.' (Family and Community Engagement Research Compendium, 2013).

Sources

Find out more about the evidence underpinning the benefits of sharing songs, stories and rhymes.

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