



March 2020

## **The Reading Agency Covid-19 Toolkit to Stay Connected**

The Reading Agency is a national charity that tackles life's big challenges through the proven power of reading. We work closely with partners to develop and deliver programmes for people of all ages and backgrounds. Working with our partners, our aim is to make reading accessible to everyone. The Reading Agency is funded by Arts Council England.

The Reading Agency is paying close attention to Covid-19, government guidance and ongoing developments. Within our own organisation we are taking the government's advice and working from home and practising self-isolation and social distancing.

The wellbeing of our beneficiaries, our partners and volunteers is central to our purpose and our top priority as we join organisations around the world responding to the current global health challenge. We know many of our partners have had to close their buildings and are working remotely and therefore we want to share our resources and ideas that will help us all **stay connected**. If you are unsure of recent guidelines, please see [government guidance](#) for advice and updates and NHS guidance regarding [medical advice](#).

Our vision is for a world where everyone is reading their way to a better life and at a time when we will be home, with many people alone, it is now more than ever that books will provide comfort, solace and escapism. Books, magazines, newspapers, short stories and all the types of reading in-between, both physical and digital, could be crucial resources to get people through this period of self-isolation. Also, staying socially connected in any form is going to be important in keeping up morale and supporting everyone's mental health.

If you're a partner organisation, maybe a library or publisher, we would love to know how we can support you. We encourage you to get in contact with us so we can help disseminate your messaging around remote events, online resources and any innovative, virtual activity that you have planned. Email us [comms@readingagency.org.uk](mailto:comms@readingagency.org.uk) or message or tag us on one of our social platforms.

## Reading Groups

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[Reading Groups for Everyone](#) is the largest Reading Groups network in the country! If your reading group meetings are being rescheduled, or if you want to join or start a virtual reading group, there are many things that you can do. [Use our ideas](#) for virtual meetings to continue chatting about books. We know that it's really important to keep up our social connections, and a virtual reading group meeting is a great way to do this.

The Reading Groups website has a [virtual groups](#) page to help you find an online group that matches your interests. Virtual groups meet in lots of different ways, so check how they meet before joining. You can also set up your own virtual group.

To find a reading group in your local area, use our [search tool](#) for groups that meet in-person.

If you already have a reading group, you could try going virtual yourself...

**Face-to-face and video calls:** You can be connected in the following ways over Wi-Fi or an internet connection if they have any of the following apps. Could you stream a session over one of the following?

- [Skype](#)
- [Facebook messenger](#) video or phone chat (can be used for groups)
- [WhatsApp](#) video and phone call. You need to create a WhatsApp group with at least one other participant but then you can 'Invite to Group via link' for people to join which can help if you're worried about data protection. To start a group call click on the icon. 
- [Google Hangouts](#) if people have Gmail or Google accounts
- [Zoom](#) is an easy and free to use for group meetings lasting under 40 minutes. Just sign up, set up a 'meeting' and share the link to the rest of your group to join in. Zoom has also been recommended as a dementia-friendly online video communication. See the [Zoomettes Guide to ZOOM](#) and watch the '[How to use ZOOM](#)' film here from the Zoomettes or go via the '[Zoomettes](#)' page on the Dementia Voices website. [Jitsi](#) is also a free video conferencing service.

**Telephone group calls:** For a group to stay connected over the phone using a conference call system, [Whypay](#) is doing a 3-month free offer especially for coronavirus. Just set up an account, enter MONTHLY3 or ANNUAL3 at checkout, and you are given a free conference room number and you dial in. It seems quite user-friendly.

**You could also create a closed [Facebook](#) group.** You can create a Facebook group free and create a forum for discussions with likeminded people. Facebook Live allows you to video yourself. Just log into Facebook and in your closed Facebook group, click on  [Live video](#) in your 'create post' options. This is the time to use Facebook for the purpose in which it was created, as a platform to stay social and connected.

## Resources

### For Adults

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The **Reading Friends** team has created some amazing resources for partners and for those who want support or are looking to support others. Reading Friends aims to tackle loneliness, which is especially important at a time of isolation. [Stay Connected!](#) in their Resources Library features free and accessible resources for everyone to use.

These include a spring-themed resource pack which has activities and readings as well as [Top Tips Living in Self-isolation](#), which can be shared with those who are at risk and vulnerable at this time.

**World Book Night**, the annual celebration of books and reading, is on 23 April and there are many ways that you can get involved online and at home, both on your own and with your family. Our [toolkit](#) will provide you with ideas of how you can celebrate, and this will be available from next week.

If you're looking for some new reading materials, the World Book Night [booklist](#) has something for all interests, suitable for adults and young people. Many of the books are available as e-books and audiobooks from your library. You can also apply to receive a [free download](#) of one of our audiobook titles until early April.

**Reading Ahead** is currently underway in public libraries, learning providers, workplaces and prisons. With these settings increasingly closing their physical space and reducing activity, we want to encourage everyone who is mid-challenge to keep reading. If you're running Reading Ahead in your organisation, make sure you check out our next newsletter for hints and tips to keep participants reading. A [toolkit](#) of ideas and resources will be available soon.

**Quick Reads** are available to purchase from all usual online retailers as physical and e-books. We have a [handy guide for purchasing](#). We also have learning resources to use [with the new titles](#) and [previous titles](#) that include questions to answer after completing the book.

## For Children and Young People

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Visit our [Chatterbooks resources page](#) to download free packs full of reading related activities for children aged 4-12. Resources include colouring sheets, puzzles, games, author videos, and plenty of reading recommendations! Share your activities with us on social media using #Chatterbooks

The **Summer Reading Challenge** website enables children to keep track of the books they are reading, find reading recommendations and take part in fun activities:

[Create a profile](#) to rate and review books and unlock virtual badges.

Find books recommended by other children using the [Book Sorter](#); pick from lots of different genres, or shake up the results with the Surprise Me button! With nearly 1 million books added, there's plenty to choose from.

Join us in the Reading Club for special videos from top authors and illustrators. Dive in to the wonderful world of poetry with our [Poetry Reading Club](#); get inspired by our [interviews](#) with authors and illustrators including Adam Stower and Pamela Butchart, or go on adventure with the BBC's Bringing Books to Life [series](#).

Children can chat with each other on our [message forum](#). All users are given a screen name to help keep them anonymous, and all messages are read by our moderation team prior to publication to ensure no personal details are shared.

[Play games](#) inspired by past Summer Reading Challenges and create a profile for your chance to make it on to the leaderboard.

## For Adults, Children and Young People

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**Reading Well** supports people to understand and manage their health and wellbeing using helpful reading. The books are all recommended and endorsed by health experts, as well as by people with living with the conditions and topics covered and their relatives and carers. Books can be recommended by a health professional, or users can self-refer and borrow the books from the library like any other library book. Many of the books are available as e-books and audiobooks via library online catalogues and e-lending apps.

There are currently five [Reading Well booklists](#) for adults, young people and children. They provide helpful information and support for managing common health conditions, and dealing with difficult feelings and experiences. Some books also include personal stories from people who are living with or caring for someone with health needs:

- [Reading Well for mental health](#)

- [Reading Well for dementia](#)
- [Reading Well for long term conditions](#)
- [Reading Well for young people](#)
- [Reading Well for children](#)

Titles that may be particularly useful include:

- [Something Bad Happened: A Kid's Guide to Coping with Events in the News](#) – provides comfort, support and action plans for children learning about troubling world events. You can also read advice from author Dawn Huebner PhD on how to talk to children about Covid-19 specifically on the [Jessica Kingsley Publishers website](#).
- [Overcoming Health Anxiety](#) and [Breaking Free from OCD](#) – this is a particularly difficult time for those who already experience anxiety surrounding their health and OCD. These titles provide advice and support for dealing with feelings of worry around health and managing intrusive thoughts. See also [OCD Action's advice](#) on managing OCD during Covid-19.
- The [Reading Well for long term conditions](#) booklist provides practical support and advice for managing a variety of long term conditions such as asthma, COPD and heart disease, including the impact they can have on [mental health](#). It also has resources for [anyone in a caring role](#) for someone with health needs.

**[Mood-boosting Books](#)** is a national promotion of uplifting titles, including novels, poetry and non-fiction. The books are all recommended by readers and reading groups.

The Reading Well programme works with [leading health experts and organisations](#) to ensure that the booklists provide quality assured, expert endorsed health information. Many of our partner organisations have created resources to help people look after their health and wellbeing at this uncertain time. Visit the [Reading Well website](#) for the full list of resources.

## Links to audio media

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- Free e-books and audiobooks through apps such as [Libby](#), from [Overdrive](#) or [Borrowbox](#)– you just need to download the app/s and sign up with your local library card.
- Your local library website will also have free digital resources you can access, such as newspapers and magazines.

- Radio and podcasts could be different options to watching TV:
  - [BBC Sounds](#) has a wide array of interesting programmes, podcasts, radio and music – you just need to register or sign in with a free BBC account.
  - Here are some of The Reading Agency’s teams favourite podcasts: Desert Island Discs, [Guardian Books Podcast](#), [Metro Book Chat](#), Podcasts from the [publisher Penguin](#), The Happiness Lab with Dr Laurie Santos, Science Rules with Bill Nye, How to Fail with Elizabeth Day, Culture Call from the Financial Times, Reasons To Be Cheerful, [Damian Barr's Literary Salon](#), The Steve Austin Show, New Yorker's The Writer's Voice, I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue, Melvyn Bragg's In our Time, Word of Mouth, Library Girl and Book Boy, The Private Eye Podcast, Happier with Gretchen Rubin and the [Red Hot Chilli Writers](#) which features Quick Reads authors!
  - The [Women's Prize podcast](#) - they have a backlist on the website and are part of the #ReadingWomen campaign
  - [Poetry Exchange](#) A site celebrating and sharing poems as friends. Listen to people reading and discussing poems.
  - The [Anything But Silent](#) podcast from the British Library muses on the power of books and libraries – featuring our own [Reading Friends](#) programme.

## Reading suggestions

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- Our Reading Partners team work with our publishers to produce regular booklists. These lists can be found on our social media platforms including [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#), as well as on [Reading Groups for Everyone](#).
- Have a look at the [BBC 100 Novels that Shaped our World](#) to inspire reading choices and find out more about some of the authors.
- The International Booker Prize has recently announced the [longlist](#) for the 2020 Prize, celebrating the finest fiction in translation from around the world.

- Get involved in the Women's Prize for Fiction's #ReadingWomen campaign to celebrate its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. You can also follow the 2020 Prize by reading the recently announced [longlist](#).
- Discover the latest season of the [Radio 2 Book Club](#) with Jo Whiley. You can listen to the authors on the Jo Whiley show on BBC Sounds, and get even more recommendations by seeing all the [books featured last year](#).
- Some lighted-hearted articles on [Literary Hub](#).
- Read how [indie booksellers](#) are offering story time streams, discounts and even phone calls.
- *Hope in The Dark* and [A Paradise Built in Hell by Rebecca Solnit](#) both talk about how communities come together in crises and how uncertain times can inspire hope.

## Connecting communities

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Here are some ideas on how we can stay connected and keep sharing at this challenging time:

- Send a letter, poem, story, postcard, drawing, photo, book recommendations or suggestions, video clips via social media, WhatsApp or email. For those not online, could you text, put something in the post on the way to do your essential shopping or call and share a story?
- Facebook Live could enable you to read and share stories with your group or the wider community like this [library](#). Just log into Facebook and click on  Live video in your 'create post' options (you could do this within your closed Facebook group or wider).
- If schools are teaching any classes online from home, could they write, photograph or video any of the above as part of their online lessons?
- Encourage people to stay connected with you and us on social media and share activities and information. Find us @readingagency, @readingfriends and @WorldBookNight on platforms: [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)

- [Dementia diaries](#): Would any of your participants or volunteers living with dementia like to take this time of living in self-isolation to record/video their experiences of living with dementia? Or a volunteer might want to use this time to transcribe audio diaries?

## Signposting

### Other services and activities

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- [Silver Line](#) – a free confidential helpline providing information, friendship and advice to older people.
- [RNIB](#) – run their own telephone book clubs which are free to join.
- [Covid Mutual Aid](#) - Local organising to support the most vulnerable in our communities. Volunteers run local community groups to provide support and resources for those in need. Visit the website to find your local group and get involved.
- [London Renters Union](#) and [Tenants Union UK](#)– provide legal advice and resources for renters in difficulty due to the Covid-19 outbreak.
- [Sofa Singers](#) – join an online choir. The Zoom link can be accessed through the website.
- [Dementia Diaries](#) – find out about people’s experiences of living with dementia.
- [TIDE](#) -Together in Dementia Everyday – are hoping to set up virtual coffee mornings. We will share details when we have them.
- [Cruse](#) – A bereavement charity providing support to those who may have lost loved ones due to the virus.
- [Shout Crisis Text Service](#) – A free 24/7 textline support for those feeling in crisis. Text SHOUT to 85258.

While it’s important to stay informed, having a non-stop stream of notifications and speculation can be damaging to mental health. Several leading mental health organisations have shared advice on **looking after your mental health** during the Covid-19 outbreak. Click the links below to find out more.

For adults:

- [Rethink Mental Illness](#)
- [Mental Health Foundation](#)
- [Mind](#)
- [Every Mind Matters](#) – official NHS advice on dealing with uncertainty and looking after your mental health during the Covid-19 outbreak.

For children and young people:

- [Anna Freud Centre](#)
- [Young Minds](#)
- [The Mix](#) – moderated online discussion boards for young people to discuss their concerns around Covid-19