

Guiding principles of Reading Friends

Delivery principles

What is Reading Friends?

Reading Friends is The Reading Agency's reading connection programme. It connects people by starting conversations through reading, giving opportunities to meet others, share stories, make new friends and have fun. It creates social connections and takes a person-centred approach building on interests and hobbies of the people involved to get people talking. Developed with funding from the Lottery and Government.

Who is it for?

Reading Friends is for everyone, but we focus on connecting people who are vulnerable, isolated and at risk of loneliness. Originally, older people, people with dementia and carers were identified as those most at risk but growing research has expanded this remit. Loneliness is a serious problem with far-reaching implications. It is linked to poorer health outcomes,¹ and chronic loneliness has been linked to poor physical health, poor mental health and poor personal wellbeing.²

How is it delivered?

Reading Friends is delivered by local community-based delivery partners through volunteers and staff. Public libraries have been core to the development and delivery of Reading Friends as front-line community services. The Reading Friends model is adapted to meet local needs and can take place over the phone and virtually as well as in-person, but it works within a national delivery framework, supported by a national evidence base. Here is our last [impact report](#).

What are its core values?

There are key ingredients that are essential to the Reading Friends ethos, including its accessibility, diversity of reading materials, informality and flexibility. Here are key principles to follow to create a successful and engaging Reading Friends project:

Fun	Welcoming
Inclusive	Equal
Empowering	Participant-led
Non-judgemental	Non-elitist

Fun and Welcoming

An enjoyable experience with friendly and approachable staff and volunteers, in a familiar and comfortable place.

Inclusive and Equal

Open to anyone and responsive to people's needs. There is no hierarchy, everyone is a Reading Friend just with different roles.

Empowering and Participant-led

Participants are given opportunities to be involved in what happens during sessions and what they would like to read or do.

Non-judgemental and Non-elitist

All kinds of reading are involved. There are no set texts or specific approaches to reading that need to be followed.

¹ House of Commons Library (2021) [Tackling loneliness](#)

² DCMS (2023) [Tackling loneliness evidence review: executive summary](#)

Session principles

What reading materials can a session contain?

Reading Friends is not a structured book group or literary model. The focus is on books and reading as a conversation starter. Reading takes many forms and can include books, newspapers, magazines or zines, poems, quotes, excerpts, comics, short stories, picture books. Different formats such as e-books or audio books can also be used. We have information about what has worked well in sessions in our training and resources. Our reading is 'in the moment' without participants having to have read something before a session. This means that it is suitable for people living with dementia and their carers as well as people with other conditions or less time.

What does a Reading Friends session involve?

Reading Friends is participant-led, giving people choices about how sessions run and what happens during them. Reading Friends sessions can therefore take many forms, based around interests or hobbies, i.e. cooking, gardening or travelling. It helps to provide some structure at the start whilst getting to know participants, but then encouraging ownership through ongoing feedback, shaping the content and making adaptations. Showcasing local resources from your organisation can help to bring sessions to life i.e. local history or reminiscence collections.

Participants might like to do some of the following session ideas:

- Read, be read to, or a mix of both.
- Read at the start of each session and let conversations develop from there.
- Share a poem, quote, short story, extract or chapter, magazine, newspaper, comic, article, children's story, song lyrics, non-fiction books about interests like recipes, gardening, football, knitting, animals, or autobiographies about people's lives or local history.
- Read [Quick Reads](#), [Pictures to Share](#) or other collections.
- Themed sessions with different kinds of reading ideas such as food, holidays, nature, seasons, special times of the year.
- Book chat: chat about things they have read, authors or more generally about different genres. Our reading-related conversation ideas provide icebreakers and inspiration.
- Share and exchange favourite poems or stories.
- Share reading material from their homes: letters, cards, postcards, diaries.
- Develop confidence with reading, reading aloud and learning new things.
- Read together something you would not normally read.
- Listen to storytelling or take part in sharing stories.
- Use our resources containing reading-related discussions, ideas, and activities.
- Do the crossword.
- Do activities or games like hangman, anagrams like the 'countdown conundrums', or word wheels.
- Share booklists or prize lists, i.e. Booker Prize, and see if they've heard or read any of the books on the list.