

How to run a virtual reading group with children



Photographs © Dave Warren 2019 for The Reading Agency

Are you wondering how your reading group can continue to meet, even while you're social distancing? With restricted access to public and school libraries many children and families at home are looking for activities to keep children entertained. We know that books are so important to provide comfort, solace and escapism as well as fun. Staying connected and keeping your regular reading group meetings in your diary, is going to be very important in keeping up morale and supporting children as they continue to adjust to a new way of living. Social distancing definitely doesn't mean a pause to your reading group's activity, and we're here to help with suggestions of how you can keep going.

Virtual reading groups can help children with their confidence through talking about books, and to encourage them to read more widely. You can also work with targeted groups, for example to engage [reluctant readers](#), to sustain reading recovery, to motivate high attainers, or to support transition from lockdown back into school.

How can your group go virtual?

There are different ways that you can have your reading group discussions. You can either arrange times for video chats, or have an online forum where students share their thoughts at a regular time. You may ask your class to send in their reviews which you can place on a school's [Goodreads](#) account or the children can share their reviews on the [Summer Reading Challenge website](#). All children need to do is login and then they can review any books they wish!

Think about how you would like to run your sessions. If you would like some questions to help guide the discussion, TES and Twinkl have great [guided reading](#) question ideas and activities.

Group phone and video calls

All you need is Wi-Fi or an Internet connection to use any of the following methods of staying in touch but please always make sure you are following GDPR regulations of your local authority or school's own safeguarding and privacy policies:

- Your school may use platforms such as Microsoft Teams or Google Classroom already to communicate with users students and these have online chat options you can utilise
- Zoom – online video/audio chat. For three or more people, there is a limit of 40 minutes
- Skype – online video/audio chat

Reading aloud

Due to the restrictions placed on schools and libraries due to Covid-19, some publishers have amended their rights agreements so that librarians and teachers can deliver reading activities online. This may include holding a class storytime session where you read to the class. You can find out more information on the [Libraries Connected](#) website.

Choosing your books

When running a reading group for children, it can benefit the engagement of the group if the children or young people help select the book the group will read.

With bookshops and libraries closed, you might need to be flexible in choosing your books:

- Did you know that you can download e-books and audiobooks direct to your phone, tablet or e-reader?
- You can also borrow e-books and audiobooks from your local library, just check on their website how to do this.
- Or if you prefer to have a print book, many independent bookshops are taking orders online and on the phone to post out.
- Don't worry if you haven't yet signed up for your local library, as many libraries are taking new members remotely.
- You can also sign up to run a Chatterbooks group and then sign up to the monthly [newsletter](#), every month publishers offer reading group sets of a new book to read and review. If you wanted to host short reading group sessions maybe you could all read an [extract](#) from a book and have lots of discussions based upon this
- Every month we create themed [booklists](#) for children and young people that have a wide selection of book suggestions, including non-fiction, poetry and graphic novels.
- You can also direct children to the [Book Sorter](#) on the Summer Reading Challenge website. Over a million books have been added by children on the Book Sorter so they can find out what books children have recommended and use the sorter to receive their own recommendations.
- There are teachers and librarians on Twitter and Pinterest who are sharing ideas on how they are connecting with their students virtually, so you may also get inspiration from there.

Thinking ahead

When lockdown restrictions are lifted fully, you may want to run a regular Chatterbooks reading group session with children in your school or library.

Here are five top tips for when you're starting off your club:

- Buy a [Chatterbooks group leader's toolkit](#), or invest in a training day for staff.
- [Sign up](#) to the Chatterbooks network: get the newsletter, share tips and ideas, find out about new children's books and publisher offers.
- If you're a school club contact your local library and [School Library Service](#) and plan what you can do together.
- Make sure you have a mix of activities available for each meeting (look out for our themed [activity packs](#) and [publisher promotions](#))
- Ask the children what they want to read and talk about - Chatterbooks is their club!

Some useful links

The Reading Agency has run **Chatterbooks**, the UK's largest network of children's reading groups, since 2001. Reading for pleasure has more impact on children's success than education or social class; Chatterbooks groups, which are run in libraries and schools, help children develop a lifelong reading habit. Chatterbooks is a flexible model that can be used with children aged 4 to 12, for all different abilities and in targeted or mixed groups. <http://readingagency.org.uk/chatterbooks/>

Find out more at: www.readinggroups.org/chatterbooks

You can buy Chatterbooks packs in The Reading Agency shop. There are also free publisher provided packs put up regularly that you can use: <https://shop.readingagency.org.uk/collections/children>

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. The Reading Agency is funded by Arts Council England. www.readingagency.org.uk

The **Chatterbooks resources page** has hundreds of free resources that you can use with your group, class or individual. These resources include monthly themed [booklists](#), audio videos, [Chatterbooks packs](#) to use with your group and digital resources provided by our publisher partners. <https://readingagency.org.uk/resources/?programme=chat>

We also have a TES page which has some guidance created for schools and libraries during the Summer Reading Challenge which may still be useful due to lockdown restrictions: <https://www.tes.com/teaching-resources/shop/TheReadingAgency>

Reading Well helps people to understand and manage their health and wellbeing using helpful reading. The books are all chosen and endorsed by health experts, as well as people living with the conditions covered, and their relatives and carers. We launched the new Children's Mental Health scheme just before lockdown and this could support with the recovery curriculum. The [booklist](#) is targeted at children in Key Stage 2 (aged 7-11), but includes titles aimed at a wide range of reading levels to support less confident readers, and to encourage children to read together with their siblings and carers.