

## Focus: Reading as a means to promote wellbeing and empathy

*Children who engage with reading are three times more likely to have high levels of mental wellbeing than children who are the least engaged.*

National Literacy Trust, September 2018

### Research

The National Literacy Trust carry out an annual survey into the reading habits of children and young people. Since 2018 they have included questions on reading for wellbeing. Their 2023 report includes the following data:

- Nearly 1 in 2 children and young people (46%) said reading made them happy.
- 3 in 5 said reading helped them relax.
- 3 in 10 said reading made them feel more confident.
- 3 in 10 said reading helped them deal with problems.

[Reading for mental wellbeing: Children and young people's voices in 2023 | National Literacy Trust](#)

According to the BBC, reading for 30 minutes a day increases health and well-being. Reading for pleasure has been found to improve our confidence and self-esteem, providing the grounding we need to pursue our goals and make life decisions. It can also aid our sleep and reduce feelings of loneliness.

[Reading for mental wellbeing in Why is reading good for me? - BBC Teach2023.pdf \(cdn.ngo\)](#)

Reading can change your brain. Studies have shown that people who read 30 pages of a book at night will have more brain activity in their left temporal lobe the following morning. This is the part of the brain that is responsible for memory, verbal recall and emotional regulation. Reading can therefore improve memory and vocabulary and reduce stress and anxiety.

[YouTube: Reading changes your brain - Dr Jack Close](#)

Research at the University of Sussex in 2009 found that reading for just 6 minutes can reduce stress levels by as much as 68 percent, even more than listening to music, drinking tea or going for a walk.

[Reading For 6 Minutes Reduces Stress By 68 Percent - AnxietyCentre.com](#)

## Resources to promote wellbeing and empathy

### [Empathy Lab: Read stories. Build empathy. Make a better world.](#)

Empathy is a learnable skill, and books play an important role in nurturing it. Empathy Lab put together an annual list of books to promote empathy, along with a fantastic toolkit, with accompanying resources and ideas for spreading empathy. It is worth looking back over previous years' book lists too, available on the website. Look out for free training each year.

As well as encouraging schools and families to participate in Empathy Day (this year on 6 June), they also hold an Empathy Action Month in November, to build on the resolutions made on Empathy Day.

### [Reading Well for Teens - The Reading Agency](#)

Provides a list of books which may help teens to deal with managing their emotions and cope with difficult times.

### [www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)

Kooth is a free, safe and anonymous online emotional health support service for ages 11-18 in Devon. Kooth offers wellbeing support 365 days a year via a range of self-help materials and peer to peer support which young people are able to contribute to. Kooth also has an online wellbeing team from 12pm- 10pm on weekdays and 6pm- 10pm on weekends offering 1:1 text- based online counselling via live chat or messaging. They are in the process of producing bookmarks to publicise their service and we will be distributing them in due course.

### [Bibliotherapy Skills Course Exeter — Exeter City of Literature](#)

“A new and ambitious course offering unique skills to those working in community-focused organisations. Trainees will develop bibliotherapy skills that they will be able to use to support people in their workplace and communities who would benefit from personalised book prescriptions and conversations around reading in order to increase their overall wellbeing.”

— Introduction to Bibliotherapy Skills, Course Description

### [Reading and Wellbeing – Literacy Lab \(ed.ac.uk\)](#)

The Scottish Book Trust are currently doing research with the University of Edinburgh about the links between reading and wellbeing. They have produced a useful reading guide with suggested questions you might use in discussions with book groups or on 1:1 sessions with students, available at [Reading and Wellbeing: a reflective reading guide](#)

Opportunity to share ideas and good practice from participating schools.

## And finally ...

Who needs books for wellbeing?

[Wellbeing snails become mascots at Devon college library - BBC News](#)