# Reading aloud declines among UK children as screen time soars, triggering literacy concerns



New research from HarperCollins UK and Farshore reveals a disconcerting trend in children's reading habits that could have significant long-term implications. Once cherished as a fundamental bonding experience, the practice of reading aloud to children is declining, posing a risk not only to literacy but also to emotional development.

The findings, part of the 2024 Understanding the Children’s Book Consumer survey conducted with NielsenIQ BookData, indicate that less than half of parents with children aged 0–13 perceive reading aloud as enjoyable. This stark statistic reflects a broader cultural shift, particularly among Gen Z parents who, influenced by their own screen-dominated upbringing, may regard reading more as an academic chore than a source of joy. This perception has permeated the younger generation; nearly one in three children aged 5–13 now see reading as merely a subject to master, a significant rise from 25% a decade ago. Notably, among 11 to 13-year-olds, the number jumps to 35%, highlighting a concerning trend towards viewing reading as a task rather than a leisure activity.

The gender disparity is particularly troubling, with research indicating that boys are falling behind in reading engagement. Daily reading among toddlers shows only 29% of boys are read to consistently, compared to 44% of girls. This gap only widens with age—by 13, a mere 12% of boys read for pleasure every day. Alison David, Consumer Insight Director at Farshore and HarperCollins Children’s Books, remarked on this alarming trend, stating, "Being read to makes reading fun for children. It’s very concerning that many children are growing up without a happy reading culture at home."

Compounding this issue, a separate report from HarperCollins highlights increased screen time among children. In 2020, just 31% of 5-7-year-olds read daily, a decrease from 41% in 2019, while more than 43% of 8-10-year-olds reported spending over two hours on devices each day. This shift toward screens has significant implications for the development of reading habits and the enjoyment of literature.

However, amid these challenges, there are alternatives emerging that show promise. HarperCollins UK has initiated a pilot programme called “Social Reading Spaces” in partnership with the School Library Association, designed to re-engage adolescents with reading. In a stress-free book club environment, students participated in discussions and social activities around literature, leading to a remarkable 60% expressing increased interest in reading post-participation. In one instance, boys involved in the club experienced an average increase of 1 year and 3 months in their reading age, compared to only 5 months for their peers who did not participate.

The need for awareness is pressing; as many parents juggle the complexities of modern life, the importance of creating a nurturing reading environment at home cannot be overstated. The current research serves as a poignant reminder that storytime is a crucial avenue for fostering connection, emotional intelligence, and literacy skills in children. Even dedicating just five minutes each day can have transformative effects on a child's life narrative.

Recognizing this decline and its implications, HarperCollins has designated 2025 as 'A Year of Reading for Pleasure'—an initiative aimed at enhancing children's well-being and improving their futures through a renewed focus on the joys of reading. This campaign seeks to reinvigorate storytelling across various channels, encouraging schools and families to implement regular 'storytime' practices that foster both connection and joy.

In navigating today’s busy world, many may feel overwhelmed by parenting expectations, yet the message is clear: children benefit immensely from reading. By prioritising storytelling as a nurturing daily ritual, parents can help rekindle the magic of reading aloud, creating spaces filled with laughter, imagination, and lifelong memories.

As we collectively face the challenges of transforming our children’s reading experiences, it is imperative to remember that fostering a love of books can empower future generations to thrive far beyond the classroom.

**Reference Map**1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3
2. Paragraphs 3, 4
3. Paragraph 4
4. Paragraphs 5, 7
5. Paragraph 5
6. Paragraph 6
7. Paragraph 6

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

* <https://www.mother.ly/parenting/why-reading-aloud-is-declining/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.thebookseller.com/news/screen-use-grows-reading-pleasure-among-children-declines-1249155> - A report from HarperCollins imprint Farshore reveals a decline in children's daily reading habits, with only 31% of 5-7-year-olds reading daily in 2020, down from 41% in 2019. The study also highlights a significant increase in screen time, with 43% of 8-10-year-olds spending over two hours on smartphones or tablets daily. The report emphasizes the importance of reading for pleasure and suggests that daily reading could improve children's life chances.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/books/article/2024/jun/04/children-read-fewer-less-challenging-books-uk-and-ireland-study-finds> - A 2024 study surveying over 1.2 million pupils in the UK and Ireland found a 4.4% decrease in the number of books read by students compared to the previous year. The decline is particularly notable in secondary schools, with older students reading less challenging books. The study attributes the decrease to factors such as post-Covid school absences and reduced dedicated reading time, linking increased reading time in school to higher reading attainment.
* <https://harpercollins.co.uk/blogs/features/harpercollins-declares-2025-a-year-of-reading-for-pleasure> - HarperCollins UK has declared 2025 as 'A Year of Reading for Pleasure' to address the decline in children's reading habits. The initiative aims to promote reading for enjoyment, improve children's well-being, and enhance their future life chances. HarperCollins plans to advocate for reading through various channels, support 'storytime in schools,' and expand 'Our Little Big Book Club' in association with the National Literacy Trust.
* <https://uk.renaissance.com/blog/press-release-what-kids-are-reading-2024/> - The 2024 'What Kids Are Reading Report' by Renaissance Learning reveals a 4.4% year-on-year decrease in the number of books read by pupils from Year 1 to Year 11. The study also highlights a decline in reading enjoyment, with only 35% of children and young people aged 8 to 18 saying they enjoy reading in their spare time. The report suggests that increased daily reading time could offer significant improvements in reading attainment.
* <https://www.scholastic.com/readingreport/rise-of-read-aloud.html> - Scholastic's Kids & Family Reading Report indicates that while 55% of children aged 0-5 are read to at least five days a week, this frequency declines as children grow older. By ages 6-8, only 38% are read to daily, and by ages 9-11, the figure drops to 17%. The report emphasizes the importance of reading aloud in fostering a love for reading and suggests that parents should continue reading to their children even after they become independent readers.
* <https://library.wyo.gov/reading-aloud-a-key-to-childhood-development-and-lasting-memories/> - The Wyoming State Library highlights the benefits of reading aloud, noting that 83% of children aged 6-17 love or loved being read to. However, the frequency of reading aloud decreases as children age, with only 38% of 6-8-year-olds being read to daily. The article emphasizes that reading aloud is crucial for developing literacy skills and creating lasting memories, and encourages parents to make reading a regular part of family life.