

# Booktouch

## A guide to enjoying books and reading with blind or partially sighted children



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



# Welcome to Booktouch

This guide offers lots of ideas on how to enjoy books with your blind or partially sighted child. It also suggests a range of books that you can share together. We have included tips given to us by parents and experts that you might find useful when you're sharing books with your child. Not all of the information or books will be right for every child but we hope that this is a useful starting point.

Booktouch is part of the Bookstart programme which offers the gift of free books to children at key ages before they start school. Bookstart aims to inspire a love of reading that will give children a flying start in life.



# Why share books with babies?

- Sharing books together develops a closer bond between parent and child.
- Reading with your child from an early age develops language and literacy skills.
- Books can help to develop a child's health and emotional wellbeing.
- Sharing books promotes parents and carers as the child's most important and enduring teachers.
- Children become familiar with books, learning how to hold them and turn the pages.
- Your child's fingers can start to learn about shapes and textures.
- All children should have access to stories, books and rhymes.

## Did you know?

Long before children learn to speak, they enjoy listening to the sound of your voice. This also gives them a feel for the sounds, rhythms and rhymes of language.

# When can I start?

- It's never too early or too late to start sharing books with your child. You can cuddle up together and enjoy a book at any age.
- Don't save books for bedtime - share them anywhere, anytime. Try taking them with you to relieve the boredom of a long journey, queue or waiting room.
- Children will enjoy the comfort and attention of sitting on your lap as you read. As they get older, encourage them to help choose the stories you read together.



## Top tip

If your child is beginning to be aware of Braille, sitting at a table may make it easier to follow the dots.

# How do I find the right books?

- Your Booktouch pack contains two great books and this guide offers lots more ideas on other books you might like to try.
- Use books and rhymes that you enjoy, perhaps including some you remember from your own childhood, because you will probably end up reading them again and again.
- Using your local library will mean that you can experiment with lots of different books.
- Ask other parents about their favourite books and swap books with each other for extra variety.
- With time your child will start to develop their own tastes and want to choose the books.

## Top tip

Toddlers can often be too active to listen to a whole story and will only sit still for a short time, but be patient – with time they'll be able to concentrate for longer.

# Which books should I look for?

- Books with songs and rhymes are fun and can help children to learn about turn-taking.
- Visually impaired children may not be familiar with things that they might otherwise take in from seeing the world around them, so it can be helpful to start with books that contain things that your child has recently experienced. For example, books about going to the park, a trip to the seaside or a visit to the doctor.
- As your child grows, try different types of books that reflect his or her interests.

## Top tip

Look out for books with removable pieces in (recognisable) shapes.

# How can I make sure my child feels involved?

- Encourage your child to help hold the book and turn pages, from an early age.
- Keep relating the things you read about to your own child's environment. For example, "You've got a teddy bear too, haven't you?"
- Ask questions and offer lots of extra descriptions.
- As your child grows, keep books where he or she can reach them.
- Encourage your child to help choose books.

## Top tip

You might try using tactile stickers on the cover or spine, to help your child find the book he or she wants. You might also want to add your own text inside books, with words in Braille, Moon or large print.

# What types of books can I try?

Here are some ideas on the type of books you might want to consider for your child. There will also be specific book suggestions later on in this booklet.

## Books with strong pictures

- The extent to which visually impaired children can appreciate illustrations will of course vary but in general, simple, bold illustrations without too much detail are easiest to see.
- Look for books with contrasting colours and a clear outline around the words and pictures.
- Clear photos of real objects and people are also easier to see.

### Top tip

You may want to check that the story does not rely too much on the pictures.

## 'Touch and feel' books

- Children can start to learn at a very young age by feeling things.
- 'Touch and feel' books offer extra fun for all children because there are lots of different textures for them to touch.



- 'Touch and feel' books are especially valuable for children who may move on to reading by touch.
- Try fabric books, with flaps, noises and textures.
- Look out for 'touch and feel' books with different size shapes that are meaningful, reflecting what is actually in the picture.

### **Top tip**

Take things slowly and talk through what a child is going to feel. Remember that it can be quite a shock to have your hand thrust into an unexpected texture, like paint, water or sand, without any warning!

## **Large print books**

Blind or partially sighted children may be able to read print or large print, sometimes with the help of specialist equipment. Most books for younger children have large print but size isn't the only factor that affects how easy it is to read. Try looking for:

- Contrasting colours for print and background (e.g. black text on white background, or dark blue text on yellow).
- Plain backgrounds (rather than words printed over pictures).
- Plain fonts (not italics).
- Matt pages (instead of gloss).

In your Booktouch pack you will also find more information about getting hold of large print books in the Access to reading booklet.

# Reading through touch

**Braille** is a system of raised dots representing words, letters and punctuation. **Moon** is a system using raised letters that are simplified versions of the Roman letters. You may want to get advice on which system will best suit your child's needs.

- Children who are not blind or partially sighted see print all around them from a very early age - on cereal packets, road signs, etc. This helps prepare them to read later on. Blind and partially sighted children should be given the same opportunity of 'reading' the world, enjoying books and collecting information from an early age.
- Early years books with Braille or Moon can help children to become familiar with feeling the dots and making the connection between them and words.
- It may not be clear when they are very young whether Braille or Moon may be right for them when they are older.



# Listening to books

- Lots of nursery rhymes and stories for all ages are widely available on CD.
- You can find audio books to borrow from your local library and second-hand ones in charity shops.
- Audio books can help give children a sense of language and can be listened to with other family members or independently.
- You may also want to look out for books with buttons to press (or pages to squeeze) to make noises which bring the story to life.

## Did you know?

ClearVision offers an excellent library service so that you can borrow 'touch and feel' books and books labelled in Braille or Moon.

[clearvisionproject.org](http://clearvisionproject.org)



# Make it fun

- Try changing the story to make it more relevant to your own child's life. This might involve replacing words or ideas or adding your family's names.
- Encourage your child to join in, filling in missing words or guessing what happens next.
- Ask lots of questions and encourage questions too.
- Your child may find it helpful (and fun!) if you put your body into the position of the character in the story and let them climb around you to get a 'picture' of what is happening.

# Make it noisy

- Try to throw yourself into it! Not everyone finds it easy to read aloud at first, but the most important part is your child's pleasure in listening to your voice.
- Use your voice 'playfully', with different voices for different characters, so that your child can start to recognise who is speaking. Children will also start to understand different tones of voice.
- Try adding sound effects, like animal noises, knocking at the door, the wind blowing, the telephone ringing, etc.
- Encourage your child to join in with noises and voices.
- Don't expect it to be a quiet time!

# Make it interactive

- Try acting out bits of the story. You could encourage your child to take on the role of one of the characters.
- Use props! Find objects which appear in the story for toddlers and older children to feel as you read the story.
- Touching real things (like sand or water) is great for helping children to understand something.
- Your child might like to make his or her own 'pictures' for the book, using plasticine, clay, craft materials or a collage.
- Models can be useful too, especially where you cannot use the real thing. However they can be confusing if children have never experienced the real thing – there's a big difference between a plastic toy dog and a real one!

## Top tip

If your child isn't in the mood to listen or read – try another time instead.

# Books to enjoy

There are many, many wonderful books out there to explore with your child. This booklet suggests just a few you may want to consider.

## Faces

by John Fordham  
Campbell Books  
ISBN: 978 0333994177

High-contrast patterns, faces and mirrors are always a winning combination. The crinkly pages are also great to feel and hear, and the book has a strap to attach it to a buggy or cot.



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## Baby Shapes

by The Children's Project  
ISBN: 978 1903275115

Four highly stimulating books featuring a range of shapes and facial expressions. Presented in a boxed set complete with a self-assembly mobile.



## Top tip

Adding your own textured stickers or stick-on plastic bumps (you can buy them at craft stores) makes finding the buttons easier for your child.

*“Be prepared for your books to be chewed – it’s all part of the book sharing experience!”* **Parent**

As your baby grows, so does the range of books available. Look for sturdy board books, which can be held (and chewed) by your toddler. Look for interesting shapes and textures. If your child is partially sighted, try bright, bold, high-contrast images and look for books which are not too cluttered.

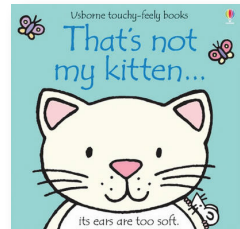
## **That's not my kitten**

by Usborne

ISBN: 978 0746041833

One of an extensive series of 'touch and feel' board books with interesting textures and shapes for inquisitive fingers to explore. Series also includes That's not my teddy and That's not my train.

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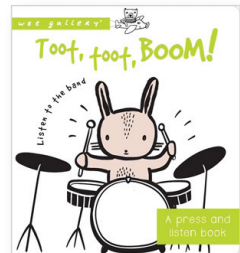
## **Toot, toot, Boom!**

Illustrated by Surya Sajnani

QED Publishing

ISBN: 978 1784938819

An interactive press and listen board book that will help your child start to recognise simple sounds. Have fun listening together, and joining in with the animals playing the different musical instruments.



Look for books which are as varied, stimulating and exciting as possible. 'Touch and feel' books should be really 'informative' to the fingers, with meaningful shapes. Textures should ideally be in recognisable shapes (e.g. fur in the shape of a animal) as opposed to just a patch.

## **The Wheels on the Bus**

by Yu-Hsuan Huang  
Nosy Crow

ISBN: 978 0857634382

Children will have so much fun joining in with this classic nursery song. A great book to introduce children to early writing hand movements. Make sure you scan the QR code on the front inside cover to hear and enjoy an audio version.



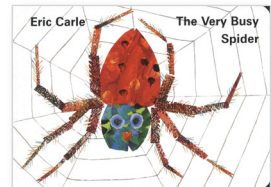
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## **The Very Busy Spider**

by Eric Carle  
Puffin Books

ISBN: 978 0241135907

The classic story of the busy spider in a 'touch and feel' board book format. Children can feel the delicate lines of the the spider's silky thread on each page, as her web grows and grows.





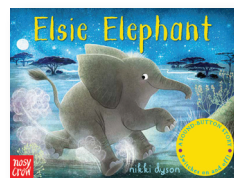
**There are all sorts of books available which make noises – here are just a few.**

## **Elsie Elephant**

by Nikki Dyson  
Nosy Crow  
ISBN: 978 1788002295

A funny rhyming book all about Elsie's adventures in the jungle. Your child can also enjoy pressing the big sound button over and over again to hear Elsie's trumpeting causing chaos on each page.

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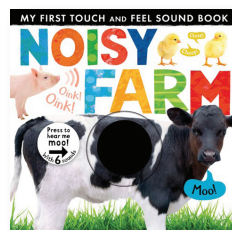


## **Noisy Farm**

by Little Tiger Kids  
ISBN: 978-1-84895-699- 5

Let your child touch, feel and hear the animals in this fun interactive board book, full of tactile textures and different farmyard sounds. Your child will love exploring every page.

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## **Garden Sounds**

by Sam Taplin and Federica Iossa  
Usborne Publishing Ltd  
ISBN: 978 1409597698

A lovely book all about the wonderful sounds of nature and the outdoors. Children can explore all of these by pressing the multiple buttons on the pages to hear the garden come to life.



### **Top tip**

Living Paintings offers a free service of specialist 'touch and feel' packs for older children.

[livingpaintings.org](http://livingpaintings.org)

## Top tip

Look out for CDs which offer singalong rhymes and interactive music. The Baby Music Company offer CDs of songs and music that come complete with lyrics and guidance notes.

[babymusiccompany.co.uk](http://babymusiccompany.co.uk)

**As your child grows, find books with lots to discuss. Look out for story books which contain holes, 'scratch and sniff' features, embossed pictures and 3D effects to really bring the story to life.**



*"Sharing songs and rhymes help children to make associations with the words and the world around them. It also encourages communication, participation, self expression – and fun!"*

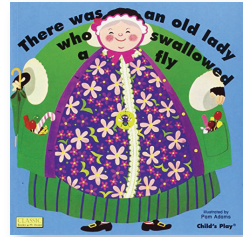
**Visual Impairment Specialist**

## There was an old lady who swallowed a fly

Illustrated by Pam Adams  
Child's Play  
ISBN: 978 0859537278

One of the Classic Books-with-Holes titles which have been around for 30 years. This new edition is perfect for small hands and the holes in the page really draw the child through the book.

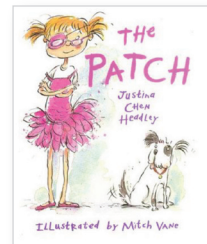
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## The Patch

by Justina Chen Headley  
Charlesbridge Publishing  
ISBN: 978 1580890496

Becca has amblyopia and needs to wear both glasses and an eye patch to strengthen her weak eye. She creates a series of imaginary adventures to explain the eye patch, before she tells her friends the real reason.



*"Babies love the sound of rhymes. Switch off the television so that your baby can really hear you."* **Parent**

All children need to find themselves in books – and siblings also need to see positive images of blind or partially sighted friends and relatives. BookTrust's website includes more information and ideas for books

**[booktrust.org.uk](http://booktrust.org.uk)**

Go online to discover more about the magic of sharing stories, books and rhymes.

For more information on Booktouch visit **booktrust.org.uk**

Bookstart is run by BookTrust, an independent charity dedicated to encouraging people of all ages and cultures to engage with books. The written word permeates all our activity and helps us to fulfil our vision of inspiring a lifelong love of books for all.

Visit **booktrust.org.uk** for plenty of information on reading for pleasure and family reading.

Useful resources:

**rnib.org.uk**

**bagbooks.org**

**clearvisionproject.org**

**puppetsbypost.com**

**livingpaintings.org**

**babymusiccompany.co.uk**

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Illustrations by Daniel Taylor

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