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Pilot randomised controlled trial of a shared reading programme to support relationships between children in care and their carers

Submission date
17/12/2025

Recruitment status
No longer recruiting

Registration date
22/01/2026

Overall study status
Completed

Last Edited
07/09/2026

Condition category
Mental and Behavioural Disorders

[ ] Prospectively registered
[ ] Protocol
[ ] Statistical analysis plan
[ ] Results
[ ] Individual participant data
[X] Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims
This study is looking at whether a reading programme called Story Explorers can help foster families build stronger relationships with the children in their care. The programme uses fun and interactive reading activities. Researchers want to see if it helps carers think more about the child's feelings and thoughts, and whether it improves children's sense of security and attachment.

Who can participate?
Foster families with children aged between 2 and 4 years old are invited to take part.

What does the study involve?
Families will be randomly placed into one of two groups. One group will start using the Story Explorers programme straight away. The other group will wait and get access later.
Before and after the programme, carers will:
• Complete short online questionnaires about reading habits and their relationship with the child
• Take part in an online interview about how they think and talk about the child
Some families will also complete extra questionnaires about the child's behaviour and feelings. Interviews will last about an hour and will be scheduled six months apart.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
Benefits may include:
• Fun and creative ways to read and spend time together
• Helping children express emotions and build confidence
• Strengthening the bond between carers and children
• Carers feeling more supported and confident when reading with children
Risks are very low. The main concerns are around data protection and time commitment. Steps have been taken to keep personal information safe and to make participation as easy as possible. Families can pause or stop at any time.

Where is the study run from?
The study is run by BookTrust's research team in London, working with local fostering and adoption services. Families will take part from home, and interviews will be online.

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
The study started in October 2025 and will finish in April 2026.

Who is funding the study?
The study is funded by BookTrust (UK).

Who is the main contact?
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Study information

Scientific Title
A pilot RCT with CHldren in foster care and their carers, testing a shared Reading Programme designed and delivered by BookTrust , compared with delayed programme access , to assess effects on child-carer Relationship quality

Acronym
CHIPRR

Study objectives
Study aims and research questions
The pilot RCT of Story Explorers is designed to test and explore the feasibility of the proposed evaluation approach, assess the suitability and sensitivity of selected outcome measures, and examine the types of outcomes that may be expected, prior to undertaking a full-scale randomised controlled trial (RCT).
It will generate evidence on whether the proposed trial design, measures, and data collection methods are feasible, acceptable, and capable of capturing meaningful change associated with participation in Story Explorers.

Primary research question
RQ1: How can we design and conduct a well-designed RCT of Story Explorers?
RQ1a: How can a pilot-controlled trial of Story Explorers be used to test whether the proposed methods, measures, and data collection approaches are feasible, acceptable, and sufficiently robust to support a future full-scale RCT?

Sub-questions:
1. Data, sample size, and allocation:
- How can we approach allocation to control and intervention groups, including the feasibility and acceptability of different approaches to randomisation?
- Can we collect sufficient data, taking into account response rates, completeness, and data quality across multiple methods of data collection, to allow meaningful comparisons between control and intervention groups?

2. Outcome measures related to bonding and relationships:
- How can change and/or impact of Story Explorers on bonding and relationships be captured?
- To what extent can parental understanding of the child's inner world (parental mentalisation) be measured as an outcome of the intervention?
- Which child-centred indicators (e.g. those reflecting whether the child experiences the caregiver as a secure base) are feasible, acceptable, and informative in this context?

3. Feasibility and practicality for families:
- How can the evaluation process be designed to be realistic, proportionate, and manageable for participating families?
- What data collection approaches minimise burden while maintaining data quality, including the use of digital and remote methods such as WhatsApp?

4. Exploration of innovative and child-centred methods:
5. Is WhatsApp a viable platform for learning, monitoring, and evaluation within this

intervention?
6. Can new child-centred methods generate meaningful insights into children's experiences of Story Explorers?

Specific objectives
SO1: To identify, test, and refine appropriate outcome measures and evaluation parameters for Story Explorers, including:
SO1a: Exploration of parental mentalisation using validated assessment question sets, to assess its suitability as a potential outcome measure.
SO1b: Exploration of how the concept of the "third space" can be operationalised and whether its emergence can be meaningfully captured through evaluation data.
SO2: To test the likely sample size, allocation approach, and data collection time points required to support meaningful comparisons between intervention and control groups in a future RCT.

Ethics approval required
Ethics approval not required

Ethics approval(s)

Primary study design
Interventional

Study design
Single centre interventional randomized controlled trial

Study type(s)
Quality of life

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
attachment difficulties and emotional wellbeing challenges in children in care

Interventions
This study is a pilot controlled trial (RCT) with two parallel arms. Families will be allocated to either the intervention or the control group. Randomisation will be carried out by the fostering service using Excel.

Intervention group:
Families in the intervention group will receive Story Explorers immediately (after baseline surveys and interviews have been done, this will include a survey and a semi-structured interview). Story Explorers includes activities and stories to support playful and interactive reading experiences at home. Families will be able to use the kits however they want, adapting it to their everyday routines and habits. They will receive 6 kits in total, one per month. There will be check-ins at months 4 and 5 of the intervention, to check engagement with programme.

Control group:
Families in the control group will not receive Story Explorers for the first 6 months (whilst the intervention group is receiving them). They will complete the same baseline assessments as the intervention group. Following the completion of the study, the families will all receive Story Explorers. There will be no check-ins with the control group.

Timeline:
Baseline will take place before the intervention begins (Oct 25) and post-intervention after 6 months (April 26).

Intervention Type
Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)
Child–carer relationship quality measured using the Child–Parent Relationship Scale at baseline (October 2025) and post-intervention (April 2026)

Key secondary outcome(s)
1. Parental reflective functioning (mentalisation) measured using the Parental Reflective Functioning Questionnaire (PRFQ) at baseline (October 2025) and post-intervention (April 2026)
2. Mind mindedness/speech sample, measured using a semi-structured interview at baseline (October 2025) and post-intervention (April 2026)
3. Reading frequency measured using a survey at baseline (October 2025) and post-intervention (April 2026)
4. Child socio-emotional wellbeing measured using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) — parent version at baseline and follow-up
5. Parental engagement with the programme measured via WhatsApp check-ins with carers at months 3 and 4 of the intervention

Completion date
01/07/2026

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
For the adult:
1. Be a foster carer
2. Have a child in their care at the moment of the intervention, aged 1-6
3. Consented to take part

For the child:
1. Be in foster care
2. Age 1-6 years
3. Deemed suitable for receiving the intervention by fostering agency

Participant type(s)
Population

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Mixed

Lower age limit
1 Years

Upper age limit
100 Years

Sex
All

Total final enrolment
0

Key exclusion criteria
1. Child in their care is younger than 1 year and or older than 6.
2. Child is expected to be in a short term placement (less than 6 months)

Date of first enrolment
22/09/2025

Date of final enrolment
01/10/2025

Locations

Countries of recruitment
United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre
BookTrust
BookTrust Head Office: No. 1 Aire Street
Working base: 29 Clerkenwell Road, Farringdon, London, EC1M 5RN
Leeds
England
LS1 4PR

Study participating centre
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BL1 4AG

Sponsor information

Organisation
BookTrust

Funder(s)

Funder type
Not defined

Funder Name
BookTrust

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan
The data-sharing plans for the current study are unknown and will be made available at a later date.

Findings will be included in the programme’s impact report, organisational communications as well as communication to possible funders as well as existing and future clients. Findings will also inform the program development and its strategic planning. Further external publications may be considered at a later stage.

IPD sharing plan summary
Other