



Read Easy

Helping adults learn to read



Do you work with adults who struggle with reading?

You may be surprised to know that, amongst your staff or clients, there are likely to be people who have this hidden disability.

A recent study estimated that there are ‘nearly seven million working age adults (aged 16-65) in the UK with “very poor” literacy, meaning they have only limited vocabulary and cannot read lengthy texts on unfamiliar topics’.

Paying the price: The cost of very poor adult literacy, Madison E Kerr, September 2021, Pro Bono Economics



‘In England alone, there are 2.4m working age adults who can barely read or can’t read at all.’

Skills for Life Survey, 2011

Adults who struggle to read:

- are five times more likely to be unemployed and four times more likely to experience long-term unemployment
- have worse mental and physical health than others
- are unable to understand basic health information, which is associated with high mortality
- are unable to support their own children's learning
- are found to have lower levels of trust in others
- are less likely to vote or take part in public and community life



'Before I learnt to read I could never have done things like I can do now, like joining the library, reading newspapers, going on public transport and going to coffee shops and the supermarket. I stayed home before.'

Steve

Graduate Reader

Many of these adults are far too embarrassed to admit their difficulties, and few feel able to join an adult education class due to previous painful experiences of failure at school.

Instead, they will generally avoid any situations where their difficulties might be exposed, or will find ways to hide them:

- ‘I’ve forgotten my glasses – can you read this/fill this in for me?’
- ‘I’ll take it home to do later.’
- ‘I didn’t get/see the form/your message.’
- ‘I lost it.’ ‘I didn’t have time.’ ‘I wasn’t well.’
- ‘I hate forms.’
- ‘I’ll have the same thing as you (on the menu)’ or ‘I’ll have the chicken option.’



Not being able to read as an adult is, for most people, an excruciatingly embarrassing situation to be in. It generally follows years of painful humiliation at school, when failure to learn to read in the early years made it impossible to participate in the rest of the curriculum as they grew older.

The problem

In work situations, adults with reading difficulties will have to avoid answering the phone in case they need to write down a message.

They won't be able to read written notes or instructions, or participate in training courses involving any reading or writing. Sometimes people will even leave their job in such a situation, rather than admit their difficulty.

Unsurprisingly, not being able to read makes you defensive.

So gruffness and apparent irritation at being asked to do things may be used to ward people off.

However, this comes at the painful and lonely cost of being seen as unhelpful or unfriendly.



'I felt like a failure, and as I got older my confidence got less. I was scared to be around people. I would shake...

As a waitress, I was not confident to take orders and so I worked in the back.'

You can read **Nicky's** full story [here](#).

Those who are parents will also struggle with the fact that they are unable to support their children's learning, or communicate with their schools.

Parents will appear not to bother to respond to school letters or requests, or attend events, and their children may not come to school with the right gear.

And, of course, their children may well be the ones at school who are struggling with reading themselves.

Yet, for the vast majority of adults who struggle with reading, learning to read is actually well within their capabilities – and it is never too late to learn.



‘When Joanne’s daughter said to her one day, “Mummy, you can’t read very well, can you?”

...she knew she had to face her fears and finally seek help.’

*You can read **Joanne’s** full story [here](#).*

Read Easy UK is a registered national charity that offers a refreshingly different approach to helping adults improve their reading.

Our local volunteer-run groups offer:

- free
- friendly
- flexible
- confidential
- **one-to-one coaching**
- from a trained volunteer reading coach...

...enabling people to overcome their fears enough to come forward for support.



'I didn't think I'd ever be able to read a book, but when I heard about Read Easy I thought I'd give it a go. I didn't think it would be as amazing as it is.

I can now have a go at reading the newspaper ... I was given my first book for Christmas... My confidence has grown... It's really changed my life.'

***Linda** is a sheep farmer. You can read her full story [here](#).*

Each of our affiliated, volunteer-run groups is led by a local management team and Coordinator, who will pair up those who come forward for support with their own volunteer reading coach. All volunteers are provided with high-quality training and resources for their roles.

Reader and Coach then meet together for half an hour at a time, twice a week, in one of a range of approved local venues.

Or, if they choose to, they can meet remotely, using tablets or computers.

Together they work at their own pace through a highly effective, phonics-based reading programme.



'As Daminan's reading improved, so did his job opportunities.'

He went from being a part time cleaner at a local factory to full time employee, his improved literacy allowing him to take and pass health and safety exams.'

You can read **Daminan's** full story [here](#).

The programme takes people systematically through the learning process at their own pace and steadily builds their confidence.

The course can take anything from nine months to several years to complete, but on completion learners will have acquired the skills they need to move on to further reading and learning.

'There are big changes for me. Now I can read... to my family. I work on a big site, and I can read the signs at work – signs for safety, directions and instructions.

I also have an extra job as a delivery driver, and since learning to read I can now operate the app, allowing me to read the place names and select the responses. I can also read the emails about my children that the school sends.'

From CB's Story



'I get on really well with [my coach] and we have a laugh! I feel I've changed quite a bit. I do feel more confident.

My next challenge is to pass my theory test and driving test.'

Guy is a paint sprayer. You can read his full story [here](#).

If you think there may be people amongst those you work with who may benefit from our support, please see [our website](#) to find out if there is a Read Easy group near you.

Read Easy is expanding steadily across the country, so if there is not a group near you at the moment, please keep an eye on our website for future developments.

Please also be aware that all our groups are run completely by volunteers, so they may not respond immediately, but will get back to you as soon as they can.

If you would like guidance on how to discuss this issue with anyone you know who may benefit, please ask to see:

‘How to engage with adults who may need reading support’



The good news is that almost anyone can learn to read as an adult and it's never too late to learn. Read Easy has worked successfully with adults in their late 80s!

You can read Ann's story [here](#).