Improving mental health and emotional wellbeing in partnership: The Chelmsley Wood Reading Den

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The context

NHS
Birmingham and Solihull
Mental Health
NHS Foundation Trust

The statistics

- March 2018: 413 children/young people in care (83% aged 5-16)
- 26% more than five years ago
- 2017-2018: 102 children had at least one contact with Solar plus 13 supported out of borough

The challenge

How to talk to children about their experiences and feelings.

“I like books about feelings because they’re simple so they help you understand without complicated explanations.”

The catalyst

- Improvement ideas from across the Trust
- Improve the quality of service offered
- Need support to progress

The offer

- £2200 funding
- Support/advice from BSMHFT communications team and library service.
- Link with Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC)

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The partnership

- Steering group
- Challenged the validity and sustainability of the original proposal
- Development of the concept of the Reading Den

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The development

- Creating a welcoming environment
- Identifying suitable stock
- Agreeing a joint brand
- Pooling skills and resources
- Co-designing with the end users

The creation (1)

- An open access resource for use by all children and families experiencing challenging situations
- Over 140 titles – recommended by practitioners and foster carers
- Space for self organised groups and other agencies to use
- A space for individuals and groups to use

The creation (2)

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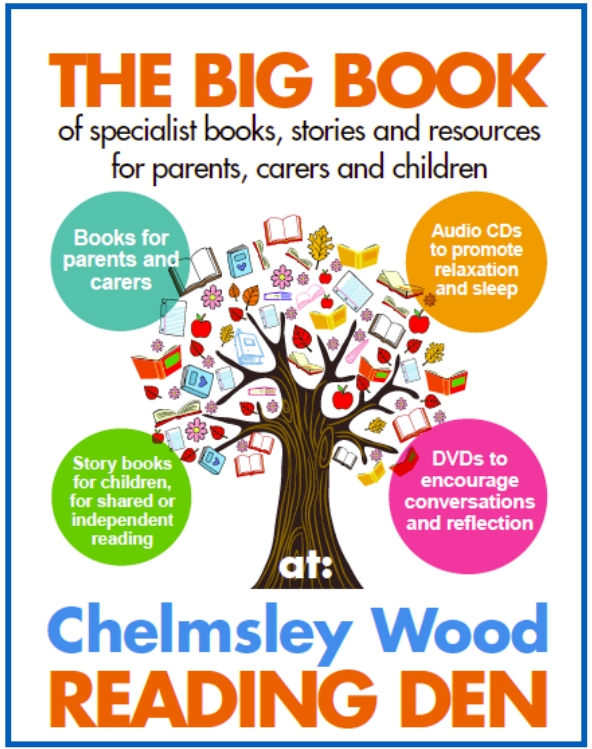
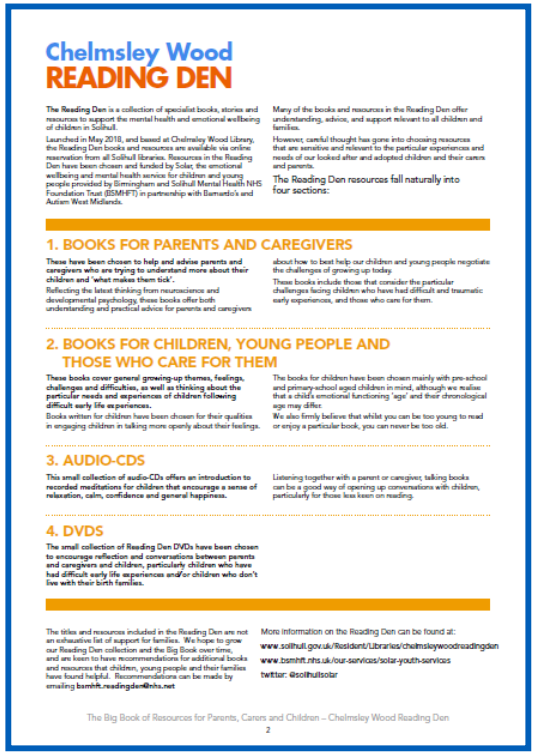
- A catalogue of resources: The Big Book





Chelmsley Wood
READING DEN

The Reading Den is a collection of specialist books, stories and resources to support the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children in Solihull.

Launched in May 2018, and based at Chelmsley Wood Library, the Reading Den books and resources are available via online reservation from all Solihull libraries. Resources in the Reading Den have been chosen and funded by Solar, the emotional wellbeing and mental health service for children and young people provided by Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust (BSMHFT) in partnership with Barnardo's and Autism West Midlands.

Many of the books and resources in the Reading Den offer understanding, advice, and support relevant to all children and families.

However, careful thought has gone into choosing resources that are sensitive and relevant to the particular experiences and needs of our looked after and adopted children and their carers and parents.

The Reading Den resources fall naturally into four sections:

1. BOOKS FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

These have been chosen to help and advise parents and caregivers who are trying to understand more about their children and 'what makes them tick'.

Reflecting the latest thinking from neuroscience and developmental psychology, these books offer both understanding and practical advice for parents and caregivers about how to best help our children and young people negotiate the challenges of growing up today.

These books include those that consider the particular challenges facing children who have had difficult and traumatic early experiences, and those who care for them.

2. BOOKS FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND THOSE WHO CARE FOR THEM

These books cover general growing-up themes, feelings, challenges and difficulties, as well as thinking about the particular needs and experiences of children following difficult early life experiences.

Books written for children have been chosen for their qualities in engaging children in talking more openly about their feelings.

The books for children have been chosen mainly with pre-school and primary-school aged children in mind, although we realise that a child's emotional functioning 'age' and their chronological age may differ.

We also firmly believe that whilst you can be too young to read or enjoy a particular book, you can never be too old.

3. AUDIO-CDS

This small collection of audio-CDs offers an introduction to recorded meditations for children that encourage a sense of relaxation, calm, confidence and general happiness.

Listening together with a parent or caregiver, talking books can be a good way of opening up conversations with children, particularly for those less keen on reading.

4. DVDS

The small collection of Reading Den DVDs have been chosen to encourage reflection and conversations between parents and caregivers and children, particularly children who have had difficult early life experiences and/or children who don't live with their both families.

The titles and resources included in the Reading Den are not an exhaustive list of support for families. We hope to grow our Reading Den collection and the Big Book over time, and are keen to have recommendations for additional books and resources that children, young people and their families have found helpful. Recommendations can be made by emailing bsmhft.readingden@nhs.net

More information on the Reading Den can be found at:
www.solihull.gov.uk/Resident/Libraries/chelmsleywoodreadingden
www.bsmhft.nhs.uk/our-services/solar-youth-services
twitter: @solihullsolar

The Big Book of Resources for Parents, Carers and Children – Chelmsley Wood Reading Den
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The day the sea went out and never came back

A story for children who have lost someone they love

Margot Sunderland & Nicky Armstrong

Each day, Eric the Sand Dragon watches the sea going out and coming back. But one day, the sea goes out and does not come back. Eric waits, but it does not come back. It feels to him as if he has lost everything. After many bleak days, Eric sees a little wild flower. It is dying. Eric knows he must save it. He finds water and more flowers appear, so Eric makes a beautiful garden. As he does, he finds the courage to feel the pain of his loss, instead of closing his heart. He realises that memories of his precious sea are like treasure in his mind, treasure he will never lose.

Always and forever

Alan Durant & Debi Gliori

When fox dies, Mole, Hare and Otter are devastated. They feel they will never get over their great sadness. How can life go on without him? Then one day squirrel comes to visit. She reminds Fox's family of all the funny things he used to do. And as the friends share dinner and tell stories, they realise at last that in their hearts and memories, Fox is still with them, and he will be – always and forever.

Books for children who have had difficult early experiences, including children who are looked after and adopted

It is impossible to find a book that is right for every child and every family. We suggest that before sharing a book with a child, you read it yourself and think about its suitability for the experiences and situation of your particular child, and their family situation.

Kit Kitten and the topsy-turvy feelings:

A story about parents who aren't always able to care

Jane Evans & Izzy Bean

Many children live in homes where things are chaotic and parents or carers are distracted and emotionally unavailable to them. This storybook, designed for children aged 2 to 6, includes feelings-based activities to build a child's emotional awareness and vocabulary. A helpful tool for use by parents, carers, social workers and other professionals to enable young children to begin to name and talk about their feelings.

How are you feeling today baby bear?

Exploring big feelings after living in a stormy home

Jane Evans & Laurence Jackson

This sensitive, charming storybook is designed to help children ages 2 to 6 years who have lived with violence at home to begin to explore and name their feelings. Accompanied by notes for adults on how to use each page of the story to start conversations, it also features fun games and activities to help to understand and express difficult emotions. It will be a useful book for social workers, counsellors, domestic violence workers and all grown-ups working with children.

A terrible thing happened

A story for children who have witnessed violence or trauma

Margaret M. Holmes & Cary Pillo

Sherman Smith saw the most terrible thing happen. At first he tried to forget about it, but soon something inside him started to bother him. He felt nervous for no reason. Sometimes his stomach hurt. He had bad dreams. And he started to feel angry and do mean things, which got him into trouble.

Then he met Ms Maple, who helped him talk about the terrible thing that he had tried to forget. Now Sherman is feeling much better. This gently told and tenderly illustrated story is for children who have witnessed any kind of violent or traumatic episode. An afterword for parents and other caregivers offers extensive suggestions for helping traumatised children, including a list of other sources that focus on specific events.

Maybe days

A book for children in foster care

Jennifer Wilgocki, Marcia Kahn Wright & Alissa Imro Gats

Will I live with my parents again? Will I stay with my foster parents forever? For children in foster care, the answer to many questions is often "maybe". This book addresses the questions, feelings, and concerns these children most often face. It is honest and reassuring. It also provides basic information that children want and need to know, including the roles of various people in the foster care system and whom to ask for help.

An extensive afterword for adults caring for foster children describes the child's experience, underscores the importance of open communication, and outlines a variety of ways to help children adjust to the "maybe days" – and to thrive.

The Big Book of Resources for Parents, Carers and Children – Chelmsley Wood Reading Den
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The early days

- Launched May 2018
- DCMS Libraries Task Force Blog – case study
- Early user statistics
- Foster carer practice group

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The next chapter

- Reader development support offers
- Reading groups and activity
- Maximising the use of future resources
- Expanding the collection
- Fundraising: Friends of the Reading Den group
- Promotional video
- Promoting in schools

Contact

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Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council