

# Bookmark Volunteering

A beginner's guide to being  
a Bookmark volunteer!



Bookmark



# Hello!

## We are over the moon to welcome you!

Thank you so much for choosing to join our Bookmark volunteer community. As a Bookmark volunteer, you'll play a really important role in building a better future for a child through reading together.

Our Bookmark volunteers really do mean the world to us. That's why we make sure you receive the best support possible. This handbook covers everything you'll need to know about volunteering with Bookmark so that you can be confident, prepared, and ready to have a big impact on the child you're volunteering with.

Thank you again for joining our community!

**Kitty Higgins**

Chief Executive Officer

# What's inside



Why we're here	2
Our values	3
Our promise to you	4
What we expect	5
How we support you	6
Keeping children safe	7
Representing Bookmark	8
Volunteering with children	9
A few things to know	10-11
Other ways to support us	12
Getting in touch	13



# Why we're here

In an average class, 8 children leave school unable to read well. These children often struggle for the rest of their education and beyond.

Covid-19 has had a devastating impact on children's education. One in four children had no schooling or tutoring at all during lockdown, and school closures are estimated to have undone 10 years of progress in narrowing the attainment gap for disadvantaged children.

Poor literacy can lead to limited job prospects, poor health, low self-esteem, and even a reduced life expectancy.

Because reading isn't just about books. It is about reading a road sign, a job advert, a bank statement or the prescription that could help save your life.

When a child can navigate words, they can navigate the world.

Bookmark has an incredibly simple vision: **we want every child to read**. We're a literacy charity giving children the reading skills and confidence they need for a fair chance in life, through our flexible volunteer-led programme.

For the children who need us, we are changing their story.

# Our values

## We have heart

- We care deeply about what we do; it is our driving force
- We believe in the potential of all children and the power of communities to support them
- We fuel our work with optimism and a positive energy, supporting each other through challenges and celebrating our achievements

## We are curious

- We are interested and constantly learning so that we can adapt to improve the support we provide
- We ask questions and contribute outside of our specialties to develop great ideas
- We have the courage to challenge the norm in search of a better alternative

## We are a team

- We work together with our volunteers, schools, partners and supporters
- We embrace diversity and celebrate differing perspectives and backgrounds
- We listen well and communicate clearly to seek understanding and achieve better outcomes

## We act with integrity

- We are trusted to always keep safeguarding at the heart of what we do
- We are honest and open within our teams and across our communities
- We are professional and hold the highest expectations of ourselves and one another

## We make it happen

- We work hard – and smart – to fulfil our promises and make an impact
- We are proud of what we have achieved and we know there is always more to do
- We each play an important role in Bookmark's story and consider how our actions impact the charity's vision





# Our promise to you

## (You have our word)

We absolutely couldn't do what we do without our Bookmark volunteers. That's why we promise you that we'll actively value your contribution. We promise we'll:

### Equip you with the right skills and knowledge

- We'll make sure you have a clear understanding of your role and provide you with all the policies and procedures you need to know.
- We'll provide you with initial and ongoing training and guidance, so you're always fully up-to-speed.

### Always make sure you're supported and protected

- We'll support you throughout your volunteering journey, offering opportunities for contact and support.
- We'll provide you with a comprehensive collection of frequently asked questions on all aspects of volunteering, in the Library.
- We'll provide interactive drop-in sessions on a range of topics to help you feel more confident with volunteering.
- We'll provide you with opportunities to connect with other volunteers and share ideas through messaging groups (like Guild) and events.
- We'll provide you with a volunteer helpline, specifically for urgent support during online reading sessions (0203 995 7962).
- If you have a query about a particular programme at a particular school, it is best to speak to the School Relationship Manager who is linked to that school. We provide the contact details for the School Relationship Manager for each school, on the Bookmark app.
- For general queries, we provide a direct messaging service to our Volunteer Services team on Guild. If you need additional support with your volunteering, you can also email us at [info@bookmarkreading.org](mailto:info@bookmarkreading.org).
- We'll cover you with appropriate insurance while you're volunteering with us.
- We'll sort any problems that you may have in your volunteer role fairly, and as quickly as we can.
- We'll keep you safe with good health and safety practices.
- We'll always stick to our organisational practices, policies and standards.

### Value you as an individual

- We'll always treat you with respect, appreciation and consideration.
- We'll work with you in line with our Equality & Diversity Policy.
- We'll be rooting for you and will celebrate your successes and achievements.



# What we expect

## (We're an open book)

Our Bookmark volunteers are incredible ambassadors for our work. As you'll be representing the charity, we ask you that you always act professionally and in line with Bookmark's values.

### We ask you to:

- Make sure you treat Bookmark staff, other volunteers, the schools and their pupils with respect and consideration.
- Support our values and act as a champion for Bookmark.
- Make sure your skills are up-to-date by completing your training.
- Log into your online reading sessions or be at the school when you've said you'll be, and if you can't be, always let the school know through the app and additionally with a phone call if it is within 24 hours of your reading session.
- For face-to-face sessions, always follow site security procedures at schools, such as reporting to reception on arrival, providing proof of identity and your enhanced DBS check. Please note, schools share their policies and procedures with you via the Bookmark app – see how to find them [here](#).
- For online reading sessions, always have your proof of identity and enhanced DBS check with you as you may be asked to show this at any time.
- Also follow all our policies, procedures and standards, including our [Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy](#), [Code of Conduct](#), [Complaints and Compliments Policy](#), [Social Media Guidelines for Volunteers](#), [Equality and Diversity Policy](#), and [Health and Safety Policy](#).
- Give as much notice as possible if you are no longer able to volunteer with Bookmark.
- Always let us know if your contact details change. You must keep us up to date with your current address and phone number.
- Always maintain the confidentiality of information you access through your role with us.
- Comply with Terms of Use for the applications, systems and platforms that we use.
- Provide us with feedback through volunteer surveys and any other forums that you choose to attend, such as focus groups.



# How we support you

## (We're always here!)

### Training

Whatever your prior experience, we'll always make sure you feel totally prepared for your reading sessions. Our safeguarding and programme training is designed to give you everything you need to engage with a child in a fun and meaningful way, whilst also developing their love of reading, and their literacy skills.

If you have any questions about your training or think of something else it would be handy to know for your role, please contact our Volunteer Services team (via Guild or on [info@bookmarkreading.org](mailto:info@bookmarkreading.org)).

### Support throughout your volunteering journey

Our Volunteer Services team are here to provide you with dedicated support. You can find out more about how to get support through the My Community page of the Bookmark Library. You can also find out about our drop-in support sessions, volunteer events and how to connect with other volunteers on our messaging platform Guild through this section of the Bookmark Library.

The Bookmark Library also has a suite of Frequently Asked Questions on a range of topics that you might find useful. We encourage you to familiarise yourself with this section of the Bookmark Library, particularly when preparing to start your first reading programme. We also have a volunteer helpline, specifically set up to support volunteers during their reading sessions, should you need help during a reading session (020 3995 7962).

### References

You can request a reference based on your volunteering work with Bookmark. This is part of our commitment to supporting our Bookmark volunteers with their own development. Please email [info@bookmarkreading.org](mailto:info@bookmarkreading.org) to do so.





# Keeping children safe

## (Safeguarding by the book)

Bookmark is committed to safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing and welfare of children, and everyone else who comes into contact with us. We require that absolutely everyone who is involved or associated with our charity - including trustees, employees, consultants and volunteers - shares this commitment.

### Please remember:

- You're not alone! Within Bookmark and each individual school, there is a dedicated team of Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) who are always available, should you ever have any concerns about a child.
- If you have any concerns about the safety or wellbeing of a child, you have a duty to report these concerns, so that the right people can help. A simple flowchart of the process you must follow is detailed in the Bookmark Library [here](#).
- If you have any safeguarding concerns, please contact the Bookmark safeguarding line 020 3995 7970. This will be answered by Kitty (DSL), Sacha (deputy DSL) or Jess (deputy DSL).
- You can find the contact details for the school DSLs on the Bookmark app. When contacting a school about a safeguarding concern, it is really important for you to clearly state that you wish to speak to a DSL about a safeguarding concern. This means that your call will be directed correctly. If you simply ask to speak to a person who is listed as a DSL, the school will not know that the call is a priority.

Ensuring child safety and wellbeing is at the heart of what we do, so you will receive safeguarding training during your induction and then again, every two years while you volunteer with us. We will also provide you with more regular safeguarding updates via our volunteer newsletter. All our volunteers are required to complete safeguarding training and read and adhere to our [Code of Conduct](#) and [Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy](#). If you have any questions about these, we're here to answer them.



# Representing Bookmark

## (Flying the Bookmark flag!)

### What to wear

Whether you are volunteering online or face-to-face, it is important to dress comfortably – at schools, you may end up sitting on a chair for a tiny person! We ask that you dress appropriately, including wearing clothes that are clean, do not carry wording or pictures that may be considered offensive or inappropriate for children to see. You can also check the school's dress code before your first session on the Bookmark app. If you're still not sure what to wear, contact the School Relationship Manager linked to the school (you'll find their details in the Bookmark app) and they will be happy to advise you.

### Code of Conduct

You are a representative for Bookmark while carrying out your volunteering role, so we ask you to conduct and present yourself in line with our values and [Code of Conduct](#). If you have any questions about conduct whilst in your Bookmark volunteer role, speak to the Volunteer Services team (via Guild or [info@bookmarkreading.org](mailto:info@bookmarkreading.org)).

### Social media

We would absolutely love you to share your experiences and tell others about Bookmark through social media. We expect that any information or opinions posted by our Bookmark volunteers represent our charity positively.

Any posts should not conflict with any of our commitments to preserve the privacy and confidentiality of information relating to children, schools, Bookmark and its employees and volunteers, and others associated with Bookmark. Further guidance is set out in our [Social Media Guidance for Volunteers](#).



# Volunteering with children

## Gifts

We encourage you to have a positive relationship with the children and schools you support. However, you must not give any personal gifts to children. It may be inappropriate for reasons you're not aware of, give the impression of favouritism, or raise expectations of the level of support you can provide. Bookmark volunteers must also not accept gifts of monetary value from children or the school (gifts such as thank you letters or pictures drawn by the child are absolutely fine!). If you are unsure whether you are able to accept a gift, please contact the Volunteer Services team (via [info@bookmarkreading.org](mailto:info@bookmarkreading.org)).

## Mobile phone use

Remember not to use your mobile phone when you're with a child, or have your mobile phone in view at schools, whether that be online or face-to-face. We ask our volunteers to have their mobile phones with them when volunteering, but keep them turned off or on silent, and out of sight.



# A few things to know

## We value diversity

Diversity is really important to us and we're committed to ensuring that our opportunities are accessible to all, so that children can benefit from reading volunteers from all walks of life. Find out more in our [Equality and Diversity policy](#).

## We want you to be happy and healthy

Your wellbeing, health and safety are very important to us. Health and safety information is included in your induction with the school when you first visit for face-to-face sessions. If you are booked in for online reading sessions, the school may be in contact with you via email before you start to arrange an online induction for their school. School health and safety policies can be found on the school website and there will be a link to this in the Bookmark app.

We ask you to be sure to take reasonable care of your own health and safety and of others who may be affected by your actions, and to report any health and safety incidents or concerns to the appropriate School Relationship Manager (their contact details can be found via the app). Bookmark has the appropriate insurance in place to protect volunteers. You can find further information in our [Health and Safety Policy](#).

## Please update us with any changes to your contact details

We understand that your contact details may change over time. It is important that you let us know any changes to your address, phone number and email address as soon as possible. You can do this easily via a simple online form on the Bookmark Library [here](#).

## We understand that plans change

We try to make our reading programmes as flexible as possible to fit around your other commitments. Volunteering is a commitment and we encourage volunteers to book reading programmes when they can commit to supporting a child for the 6 week programme. However, we also understand that sometimes things come up, such as illness or important appointments. If you are unable to make a reading session, please let your school know as soon as you can by cancelling through the app. If you need to cancel within 24 hours of the session, please additionally phone the school office to let them know. This will ensure that the relevant school staff and child have been informed.

## We're here if things go wrong

If you have a problem or concern while volunteering with Bookmark, please let the Volunteer Services team know as soon as possible. We take your concerns very seriously and will do our best to resolve them as quickly as we can. You can find more information in our [Volunteer Problem Solving Procedure](#). We have a dedicated volunteer helpline that volunteers can use if you need assistance during reading sessions (020 3995 7962).

## We recognise that circumstances change

We understand that sometimes circumstances change and you may want to end your volunteering with Bookmark. We ask that you let a School Relationship Manager know, and we also like to ask volunteers a few questions to help us improve the volunteer experience before you leave. You have no obligation to provide feedback, but if you can we do really appreciate it.



# ... and a few more things

## Expenses

We will happily reimburse volunteers for any reasonable out-of-pocket travel expenses. We will reimburse the amount that you have spent as a result of your volunteering, up to agreed maximum levels. It's entirely up to you as to whether you want to claim expenses or not. Find further information in our [Volunteer Expenses Policy](#).

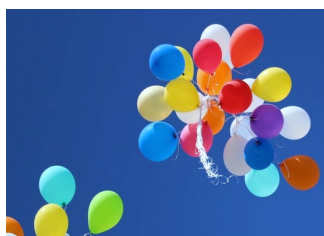
## Copyright

Sometimes we take photographs and videos of volunteers, which we use to promote Bookmark's work. If you'd prefer we didn't use your image, please just let the Volunteer Services team (via [info@bookmarkreading.org](mailto:info@bookmarkreading.org)) or Bookmark photographer know at the time. All copyrights and any other intellectual property rights in relation to your volunteering (such as photographs and the results of research) belong to us, unless agreed otherwise.

## Confidentiality

We are committed to maintaining high standards of confidentiality in all aspects of our work. Throughout your time volunteering, you may come across confidential information such as information about children, or people that children tell you about, as well as information about other volunteers and Bookmark employees. We ask that volunteers treat all personal and sensitive information as confidential and do not share or retain any such information, including identity information such as name, address or contact details. However, you must never make promises of confidentiality or secrecy to children.

No photographs may be taken of children on mobile phones or otherwise. If you have a concern about anything you learn through volunteering, please contact the Volunteer Services team (via [info@bookmarkreading.org](mailto:info@bookmarkreading.org)) or if the concern is about the safety or wellbeing of a child, report it to our Designated Safeguarding Lead (Kitty Higgins) by phoning the Bookmark safeguarding line 020 3995 7970.



# Other ways to support us

There are lots of other ways for you to get involved with Bookmark! The ideas below can help you get started, or get in touch with the team and we will be happy to give you more suggestions!

## Plan an event

From organising 'blind date with a book' events or taking part in a fun run, there are countless ways you can raise funds for Bookmark. You can encourage your friends, family, and colleagues to join you or support you – and don't forget to keep us updated! You can easily pay in the money you've raised online via our [donate](#) page, or simply set up a [JustGiving](#) page [here](#) in aid of Bookmark.

## Spread the word

We'd love you to tell your friends and family about your volunteering and the work of Bookmark. Let them know what you've been up to via [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#) by giving us a follow!

## Fundraise while you shop

You could be raising money for Bookmark every time you shop online, at no extra cost to you. [Give As You Live](#), [easyfundraising](#) and [AmazonSmile](#) turn a percentage of every penny you spend into a donation for Bookmark.

## Share your feedback

It is so important to us that our services reflect the needs of the children and schools we support, as well as the volunteers we work with. Your insights, opinions and ideas help us ensure we are providing the best services possible, so that we can fulfil our vision. Please don't hesitate to contact us with any thoughts or feedback.

## Join our Volunteer Advisory Board

Bookmark has a Volunteer Advisory Board (VAB) that volunteers can apply to join. The VAB act as a critical friend and provide independent advice and scrutiny to the charity on a wide variety of topics. The VAB also supports with a range of other activities, including but not limited to supporting the volunteer community building events, reviewing and testing new processes and technical systems, and acting as Bookmark ambassadors.



# Get in touch

**Email** [hello@bookmarkreading.org](mailto:hello@bookmarkreading.org)

**Call** 020 3995 7960

**Snail mail** Bookmark Reading Charity,  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Charles House, 5-11 Regent Street, London,  
SW1Y 4LR



Like us [facebook.com/bookmarkreading](https://facebook.com/bookmarkreading)



Follow us <https://twitter.com/bookmarkcharity>



Follow us <https://www.instagram.com/bookmarkreading/>



Follow us <https://www.linkedin.com/company/bookmarkreading/>



Follow us <https://www.tiktok.com/@bookmarkreadingcharity>



Visit our website [www.bookmarkreading.org](http://www.bookmarkreading.org)

# Thank you

(and welcome  
to the team!)

