

# Toxic masculinity and the decline in kids reading: Reading Force is working to beat the statistics

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Reading Force, the shared reading charity for serving and veteran military families, is promoting the importance of male reading role models in the face of a current youth crisis, embodied by pervasive toxic masculinity and parental exclusion from children and young adults' online life. Whether a father, stepfather, grandfather, uncle, or brother reading to a child or young person – the impact can be profound.

In today's Britain, parents and carers routinely report they are not sure what content their children are viewing online. Worse, in the small number of cases where tragedy has occurred, such as suicide or a viral challenge gone wrong, parents report they thought they were simply playing games online with friends.

Reading Force was founded fourteen years ago, in Aldershot, with the fundamental aim of **improving communication within Forces families**, whether separated by deployments, or at home together, to keep families on the same page. Frequent moves of home and school and long separations from a serving parent, can take a toll on children in the military community. Reading Force discovered if families were supported to share the same book – even while apart – having common ground to talk about usually led them to *talk about other things*.

Author and patron of Reading Force, Sir Michael Morpurgo, says:

"It's why Reading Force is so important. There's an enormous benefit for children when their families enjoys reading stories. Children find it really hard to say goodbye to mum or dad. So I think that's an important thing about a story too, it is reassuring."

Compounding the stresses of military life on families and children is the current unregulated climate of social media, often fuelling children and young people's anxiety. Notable too is the plummeting number of children reading for pleasure\* (the greatest decline here is for boys). Reading Force support parents – and particularly fathers and stepfathers – to read with the children and young people in their lives, and **in turn increase overall communication for a stronger connection**.

Award-winning author and Reading Force patron, Tom Palmer reflects on his role as a father:

"As a dad I read a lot with my daughter. Yes, it helped get her into reading, but, to be honest, that wasn't the important thing. The important thing was that it was a great way of us talking to each other, her learning about the world from a book and from me, but me learning about her too. She's 21 now and we don't read together, but we do talk a lot. We have a big challenge going on at home now and I think one of the things that helps us cope with it is that we can talk to each other. Not always, but always when we need to. Looking back, I think reading together when she was age zero to about eleven is the foundation stone to what we're like as father and daughter now."

Sharing books brings family members closer together and improves communication. Keeping fathers, grandfathers, uncles, and brothers in children's lives. Strengthening connections within families has always been the charity's priority and is arguably now more important than ever.

**In the charity's latest survey 87% of participants said taking part in Reading Force had helped them connect more with a father or stepfather.**

"My children absolutely love having books chosen for them by Reading Force, especially when Daddy is deployed as they love to tell him about the stories while he is away. Excellent quality books that facilitate special time together."

**As a charity Reading Force relies on funding to deliver its service and welcomes public donations:**

£5 allows us to send a book to a family

£10 to send a reading pack with book and resources to a family

Media:

**Related Sectors:**

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**Related Keywords:**

VE Day :: Forces Families ::  
Veterans :: Toxic Masculinity ::  
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- Corporations and philanthropic individuals can make a donation to ensure unbroken delivery of our service to military families
- Publishers can donate children's and YA books for us to send to families
- Partners in welfare can help spread the to military families and settings

For information about Reading Force and how they support serving and ex-serving families:

[www.readingforce.org.uk](http://www.readingforce.org.uk)

\*See the Lost Boys: State of the Nation, The Centre for Social Justice, March 2025

Notes to editors:

- **Award winning author Tom Palmer is available for interviews with the media to talk about Reading Force and the importance of male reading role models. Please contact [hattie@readingforce.org.uk](mailto:hattie@readingforce.org.uk) to arrange this**
- During VE Day week the charity is recognising serving and veteran families
- Reading Force is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, Registered Charity No. 1159890. Member of Cobseo
- Reading Force is supported by various charities, trust funds and corporate sponsors including The National Lottery Community Fund NI, Lest we Forget, Veterans' Foundation, Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, ABF The Soldiers' Charity, Royal Navy Royal Marines Charity/Greenwich Hospital, Army Central Fund, Garfield Weston, Babcock, Supacat, and Bolt Burdon Kemp Solicitors
- Reading Force is available FREE to ALL serving, reservist and veteran British military families, Army, Navy & Marines, and RAF, including families affected by divorce/separation, and bereavement
- As well as free books, families are provided with a special scrapbook and teen journals to fill with thoughts, photographs and drawings about the book they're reading together, and they can show it to Reading Force to receive the prize of a book and a special certificate
- Schools and welfare organisations can request scrapbooks to distribute to Forces children
- Shared-reading is proven to deliver a positive impact on social, emotional and mental wellbeing. Reading Force encourages more parents to be reading role models for their children, strengthens English as a second language and supports the development of children's empathy and friendships
- For press queries email [hattie@readingforce.org.uk](mailto:hattie@readingforce.org.uk) or call **07566 200 299**
- For more information about Reading Force go to [www.readingforce.org.uk](http://www.readingforce.org.uk)
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