BOOKS, BOOKS, BOOKS

To help children grow up with books and a love of reading—the Reach Out and Read mission—we need to be sure that appealing books are available to the medical providers to give to children at well-child visits. The book given in the exam room goes into the child’s home and becomes part of the child’s life, so we take great care in choosing the best books possible.

In partnership with Scholastic Inc., Reach Out and Read puts together a book catalog every year, offering a wide variety of books from many different publishers, which are suitable for children in our target age groups. We look for particularly attractive books of all kinds, for new favorites and old classics. The catalog is designed to make your book ordering easier and more efficient and to bring you easy access to a terrific list of books—but it is not meant to restrict you or limit you. Many programs order exclusively from the ROR Catalog, but others establish individual relationships with publishers or bookstores and supplement the books available in our catalog with a wide range of choices.

Help us find the best books!

There are many wonderful books available for children and we are always eager to see good books you have discovered and consider the books for the ROR Catalog. You are welcome to send suggestions of titles or copies of books you would like considered for inclusion in the ROR Catalog to: The Book Review Committee c/o The Reach Out and Read National Center, 29 Mystic Avenue, Somerville, MA 02145.

Quality in Writing and Illustration

There are numerous publishers of children’s books and thousands of books published for children each year. It is the responsibility of the people selecting the books for the ROR programs, whether through the ROR Catalog or individual publishers or distributors, to search out the best written and illustrated books. Some criteria to consider:

Attractiveness: Are the illustrations eye-catching or the photographs breathtaking? There are so many children’s books on the market that there is no need to settle for mediocre illustrations.

Accuracy: Are the captions under photographs easy to understand? Does the storyline make sense? If the book is non-fiction, are the facts correct?

Appropriateness: The mission of ROR and its providers is to promote a love of reading in children, not to use ROR as an opportunity to promote a particular agenda such as nutrition or moral development. The temptation to select didactic materials, no matter how worthy the topic, must never override the primary goal of choosing books that a child will love.
Format: Is the book as an object well designed? Is the binding sturdy? Since these books are going to young children, many of whom have limited experience in handling books, it is important that the book be able to withstand rough handling.

Book formats that ROR does not usually recommend are pop-ups or books with moving parts such as tabs or flaps, books with attachments such as beads or toys, or books with computer chips that make music or say words when a button is pushed. They are expensive and often break easily.

Developmental and Cultural Appropriateness

Our goal is to give children developmentally-appropriate books—books they can enjoy with the level of fine motor skills and the cognitive understanding that they bring to the process of reading. In other words, chewable books for those who will immediately mouth them, board pages for those who cannot yet handle paper—but also subjects and stories which will capture their interest, from baby faces for an infant to fire trucks for a two-year-old. We also want to recognize the broad range of ethnic backgrounds, cultures, and language groups that our patient population—and indeed our country—includes, and we hope to offer children the culturally and linguistically appropriate books that will provide both “windows and mirrors,” helping them understand themselves, their families, and the world.

So some questions to ask as you consider books for your program—or, indeed, an individual book for an individual child:

1. Is the book developmentally appropriate? What motor and cognitive skills does it require? Babies need board books, and they can’t be too big for little hands to hold. Toddlers like rhyme and repetition. Older children, able to handle paper pages, still shouldn’t be overwhelmed by too much text on the page.

2. What is the topic or focus of the book? In order to be sensitive to the many cultures and beliefs of the families served by ROR programs, books featuring the following themes are not generally recommended: religion, death, holidays, family crisis, health, or medical issues. We ask that sites respect these boundaries and avoid distributing books which touch on these sensitive areas. We also admit to a prejudice against books that carry morals or messages, however worthy—partly because children seem to be so adept at sniffing them out.

3. Does the book help the ROR program reflect a wide range of cultural diversity? Does it show children and families from one particular group—and, if so, is it a group your program serves—or does it include many different groups of children?
4. Do you think of this book as a “boy book” or a “girl book?” If so, is that because it shows children in stereotyped roles? In other words, go ahead and order fire truck books, even if you think boys may be more interested in them than girls (and be prepared for the girls to surprise you), but avoid a book in which all the boys are playing sports and the girls holding dolls.

5. Is the book available in other languages or in a bilingual edition?

Cost

In selecting books for the catalog, the ROR staff takes into account both the quality of the book and the price. We want to find the best books, yet keep the prices as low as possible to stretch our book dollars and serve as many children as possible.

ROR tries to ensure that the best possible prices are offered on the books selected for the ROR Catalog. The National Center is very aware of the financial pressures on our programs. When a coordinator or a doctor or a book committee member suggests a book for the ROR Catalog, we approach the publisher and negotiate a discount. ROR programs buy an awful lot of children’s books these days, mostly through the catalog, and we try to use that buying power to get you the books you want at reasonable prices. Sometimes, unfortunately, the discount is not high enough for us to buy the book for the ROR Catalog, but more often than not, the negotiation is eventually successful.

If you choose to buy books for your site outside the catalog, you will of course need to keep cost in mind. You may find that you are occasionally offered special deals, and when you come across a particular book offer that you want to pursue, ask yourself:

- Can I get a greater discount ordering more copies of this book? Are these books returnable if there is a problem with the book itself or the staff objects to the story or topic?
- Is the cost of the book more attractive than the book itself?

Ordering Books for Your Program

One of the best parts of being the coordinator for a ROR program is getting to order the books for the children. So let’s look in detail at the catalog, and the other common options that programs pursue, as well as at some of the logistic considerations that arise.
Reach Out and Read Catalog

The Reach Out and Read Catalog was developed by the National Center in response to many requests from our sites. We wanted to simplify the process of finding and purchasing quality books for the time-pressed staffs at ROR programs, and so we offer a large (and growing) catalog that provides ROR program coordinators and medical providers with a comprehensive selection of children’s books from a wide variety of publishers, offering them at special discounts available only to ROR programs. As part of your program start-up, you will receive a catalog, and instructions about how to start ordering.

The Reach Out and Read Book Catalog (and its supplements), published in partnership with Scholastic Inc. twice a year, offers the following benefits to ROR programs:

- A wide variety of books from over 30 publishers—many recommended by ROR sites, all screened and approved by the ROR book selection committee.
- Books in over a dozen languages including many books in Spanish and many bilingual books.
- Books reflecting a wide variety of ethnic and cultural groups.
- Discounts only available to ROR programs.
- Easy ordering and payments using a ROR prepaid account.
- Free shipping and handling.

Obviously, we are very proud of our catalog, and of the books that it includes—books that we have screened, approved, and negotiated over for good discounts. We encourage sites to use it for all or part of their book ordering, and we are always looking for ways to make it work for you. However, your first priority is to find the best books for your site, and to stretch your book dollars as far as you can in the service of your patients. So we celebrate the resourcefulness and the dedication of the many site coordinators who have found other ways to stock their shelves, often supplementing the catalog with other sources of books.

ROR Prepaid Accounts

The Reach Out and Read National Center, in collaboration with Scholastic Inc., has developed a unique system which allows individual ROR sites to put the federal funds they receive from us into “prepaid accounts” for the purpose of purchasing books in the ROR Catalog.* This arrangement of “prepaid accounts” was approved by our federal funders to assure that their book-purchase funds were only used for books. It is a familiar and easy system now used by about 95% of ROR programs. Sites always have the alternative option of buying books from other sources and submitting receipts for reimbursement; each program can elect this option when signing annual contracts with the National Center.

*Books ordered from the catalog are then charged directly against this account; the site does not need to transfer the funds or handle a bill.
ROR National Center book funds must be spent within one year of the award date, whether through a prepaid account or through reimbursement.

Special Offers
If you have a chance to get wonderful and inexpensive books of quality (remainders, windfalls, special promotions), buy as many as you can afford and can store. One way to find out about special deals is to join the ROR Listserv and receive announcements from publishers about book sales.

Many ROR coordinators have taken advantage of these offers, and have established relationships with booksellers and publishers who have brought books into their clinics. Points to remember if you do this:

- The coordinator and clinic must develop and maintain their own accounts with outside vendors.
- The program site must agree to the sales terms of the vendor and meet the payment schedules of the vendor using funds other than those from a ROR prepaid account (keep in mind that most vendors request payment within 30 days of an order, a timeline which may be difficult to meet in some hospitals because of the length of time it takes to get a bill processed and paid).
- Any problems with shipping, damaged books, or billing must be settled without the intervention of the ROR National Center.
- The quality and appropriateness of the books must always be considered.

Please visit the ROR website for more information on publishers, distributors, and wholesale and retail vendors that offer a wide variety of books.

Reading Is Fundamental
Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) is a federal program that offers funding, book catalogs, and special discount rates for qualified programs (see section on Collaboration). A number of larger ROR sites have collaborated with RIF to secure more books but are required to follow the RIF guidelines as well as those of ROR. ROR programs cannot use their prepaid accounts to purchase books from RIF catalogs.
**Tips for Ordering Books for ROR Programs**

Find someone who loves children’s books to do the ordering: Book ordering is most often the task of the ROR site coordinator. Sometimes the coordinator gets help from a supporter with special expertise. Look to volunteers in your clinic or individuals in your local community who are in literacy-related fields—children’s librarians can be particularly helpful!

Know the size and especially the age breakdown of your clinic population: Determine the number of 6-month to 5-year well-child visits your site has a month so that you will order appropriate quantities of books. Break it down: how many infant visits, how many toddler visits, how many preschool visits. (For example, you will need to remember to order chewable board books for every child under two; you’ll want an array of books that reflects the languages and cultures in your clinic patient population, and, of course, you’ll need the right numbers of books with more “story” and complex illustrations for preschool children who are four and five.)

Know the books: The chronologic age for which the story is written, the developmental stage for which the format is appropriate—that is to say, size of book, board pages versus paper pages, amount of text on a page....

Don’t underestimate the board books: You need board books for the 6-, 9-, 12-, 15-, 18-, 24-month visits—that means having quite a few different board books in stock!

Plan to stock a variety of books: It is important that a wide variety of books, reflecting different ages, ability levels, and interests be available so older children may make their own selections at the time of their visits.

Think about when you will reorder: The books go fast! Frequent ordering may be necessary depending on the number of well-child visits at your program. Books generally take 2-4 weeks to be delivered from publishers or the ROR Catalog, so remember this when supplies begin running low.

Make sure “bill to” and “ship to” addresses are accurate: At a hospital or clinic, billing and shipping addresses are often different. Introduce yourself to the shipping and receiving department at your site so they know whom to contact should problems arise with book shipments.

- Be open to comments from parents, providers, and children about what works and what doesn’t.
- Watch carefully to see which books disappear first and which are left for last.

If you have any questions about ordering books, contact the ROR National Office at 617-629-8042 or email information@reachoutandread.org.
Storing Books (or, “Who moved the TB syringes???”)

Clinic space is highly prized and often scarce. You must have accessible but secure space for your book supply. It is very helpful to keep a supply of books right in the exam rooms easily available to the provider, who then doesn’t have to go hunting for a book; the presence of books in the exam rooms also reminds both provider and parent to include a book in the visit. However, many ROR programs function well with single central cupboards, bookcases, or even mobile carts. Find a sizable amount of safe, dry, secure storage space for your main supply of books.

- Know how many books you can store at one time: Sufficient book storage space should be determined before ordering. ROR sites are occasionally recipients of gift books, remainders, and overstocks requiring additional storage. Off-site storage is often a possible solution.

- Know where you can safely store the books: All too often books disappear and most ROR coordinators keep the new books in a locked closet or file cabinet. You can put out the books needed for each day—or for each week—in the exam rooms or in a central area easily accessed by the medical providers.

The books selected for a day’s worth of well-child visits can be put in a medical records cart or in a box in an area that medical providers can easily access and choose a book for their patients. Many coordinators use file dividers to separate the books by age groups in order to make the selection process easier. Others stock a cabinet with a different shelf for each age group.

Tracking Books

Keeping track of the books that come into your program, getting them to the providers, and tracking them as they are given away all require attention. You want to maintain a steady flow of books so providers and families stay invested in the program, and children get their books!

- Keep a record of orders and books received. Save invoices and packing slips as part of your inventory system.

- Keep in mind the number of children 6 months-5 years seen weekly or monthly for health supervision visits. This will help you estimate the number of books you need in advance—and also tell you whether books are going too quickly (being given out at other visits or just disappearing) or too slowly (not being given by providers).

- Review your inventory periodically. How fast are books going? Which books are favorites and should be reordered? Is there sufficient variety? Collect opinions—formally or informally—from providers and staff.
• Ask providers to keep a record. Establish a system with clinic staff to record when a child receives a book. This will help you track and evaluate the effectiveness of your program. (Please note that programs with RIF contracts are asked to track books carefully, and that if you have RIF support, you will need to follow their tracking and reporting requirements.)

Possible ways to track the books:

• Add a box to check for BOOK GIVEN, to the existing encounter form in the patient record.

• Add a special Book Page to the medical record where providers can record all the books they give a child.

• Store a sticker or label with the name of the book inside each book so a provider can put the sticker on the chart and easily track what books the child has previously received (this is a good project if you have some volunteer help).

• Encourage providers to record the specific book or just write “book” in their notes.

Note that any of these suggestions will require a little bit of provider training, which should, if possible, be integrated into the general provider training—this means that you need to set up your book tracking system before your program starts and your providers get trained.

Additional Resources

Recommended reading lists of children’s books, in addition to the list on the ROR website, can be obtained by contacting:

The American Library Association
50 East Huron
Chicago, IL 60611
312-944-6780

Association of American Publishers
71 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10003
212-255-0200

Children’s Book Council
568 Broadway, Suite 404
New York, NY 10012
212-966-1990
Reach Out and Read (ROR) is happy to accept donated books for children at __________. Thank you for helping us put books in the hands of children. These guidelines were developed out of respect for families and in keeping with the philosophy of ROR—Every child deserves good quality books.

- We accept donations of new, developmentally and culturally appropriate books. ROR has a bibliography of favorite books to choose from, carefully selected to meet the needs of children served by ROR.
- Used books should be gently used (covers and pages intact, clean and readable).
- We primarily need books for children from infancy to 5 years of age, although books for older children may be accepted on a limited basis.
- Books about sensitive issues like divorce, abuse or death cannot be given out through the ROR program. We also cannot give out books with religious themes.
- Reach Out and Read has no pick-up service.
- Donations can be dropped off at ___________________.
  - Drop-off times: ____________________
  - Drop-off location: _______________________
  - Please make certain to tell the staff that the books are for ROR.
- Books may also be mailed to us at the address listed below. Please mark book cartons clearly.

(Local contact information goes here.)