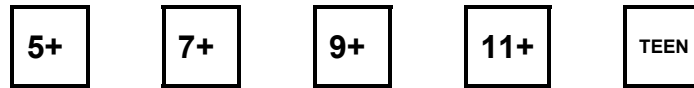


# Age Guidance Explained

From 2009, many book publishers will print a small age guidance panel on the back of their books.

The panels will look like this:



Some publishers have begun to do this already, and if you're a frequent buyer of children's books you may have seen it.

Here we explain what age guidance on books is meant to achieve and why it is being introduced.

## Why is this happening?

A book is one of the most carefully chosen gifts of all. The sheer diversity of books makes them a popular gift for children.

However, research, conducted on behalf of The Publishers' Association, shows that many adults find the amount of choice bewildering.

*"I'm not in touch with children on a day to day basis so for me it's really hard to know what age a book is pitched at."*

What may look appealing to an adult may not go down too well with the recipient, if the book is too 'babyish', for example.

This uncertainty is unhelpful, and often deters people, particularly non-parents, from buying books as presents.

*"I don't see my grandchildren that often, and you lose touch with what they like, and then I have to ask my daughter-in-law and that puts the pressure on her."*

## What will age guidance achieve?

Age guidance will mean adults can select books for children more easily, and with more confidence. It is aimed at making it easier to buy a book to suit the interest level of the reader.

Many other products, such as toys, DVDs and console and computer games, carry age guidance for buyers.

Age guidance is an industry-wide initiative. It brings books into line with other types of products as an aid to making a more informed choice.

Age guidance will be of particular use in shops where specialised staff knowledgeable of the books on sale is not available, or where time is of the essence.

*“It’s really useful for non-parents. Parents will know their children’s interests but the rest of us don’t.”*

## Put briefly

*“It’s just like for children’s clothes – you use the ages guidance as your first way of knowing where to look.”*

Age guidance is simply a broad indication of what book will suit which level of interest.

## What it is not

- ☞ a prescriptive system, aimed at restricting buyers’ choices,
- ☞ a system of censorship,
- ☞ an attempt to undermine or devalue the judgement or personal insight of the buyer,
- ☞ a replacement for personal recommendations by knowledgeable book shop or library staff.

## Frequently asked questions

### **Q. Does age guidance forbid me from buying a book for my child that’s deemed to be unsuitable?**

A. Absolutely not. Age guidance is no substitute for personal insight. If you are the child’s parent or guardian then you will have a deeper understanding of what is suitable for your child than any grading system can offer. Equally, there is not replacement for personal recommendation from knowledgeable staff in bookshops and libraries. Age guidance is not there to tell people what not to buy. It is an aid for a potential buyer who is unsure about the suitability of a title for a child whose tastes they are less familiar with.

### **Q. Who decides whether or not a book is suitable for a particular age group?**

A. The age guidance rating is agreed by the author and the publisher.

### **Q. Does age guidance indicate that there are themes in a book that are too strong, or maybe unsuitable, for the child I’m buying for.**

A. No. Age guidance is a general guide to level of interest. Publishers and authors will always take into account the content of a book when applying age guidance, just as they do when deciding on cover images, the blurb and so on, but it is primarily designed to indicate what age a book will be of interest from.