

the good childhood

a national inquiry



The
Children's
Society

The Good Childhood Inquiry

Overview of 'my life' postcard consultation with children and young people

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Introductory comments

This paper presents an analysis based on a 20% sample of 5,337 *My Life* postcards written and contributed to *The Good Childhood Inquiry* by young people (age range 4 to 17).

Many of the topics are similar to those identified in The Children's Society's 2005 national survey of young people (aged 14 to 16), in particular the cross-cutting themes of love and care; support; freedom; and fair treatment. The primary importance of relationships with family and friends was also a key aspect of both consultations.

There are also some ways in which the postcard topics differ considerably from the 2005 survey topics. An example is the importance of pets, mentioned in 18% of postcards. This may well reflect the greater significance of pets for the younger age group covered by the postcard consultation.

Overview of topics cross-referenced against inquiry themes

The paper presents details of 46 topics identified through analysis, which are presented in descending order of prevalence. The listing below cross-references these topics against the six themes of *The Good Childhood Inquiry*, plus the additional theme of poverty and disadvantage.

Some topics did not fit neatly into this structure. These including some cross-cutting topics such as 'love' and some miscellaneous topics.

Figures in brackets below refer to the number of respondents and the proportion of respondents who commented on each topic:

Cross-cutting and relationship themes

- Love (346 or 35%)
- Negative (215 or 22%) and positive (78 or 8%) aspects of others
- Care (204 or 20%)

- Arguments (137 or 14%) and getting on well
- Support (128 or 13%)
- Bereavement and death (115 or 12%)
- Violent and intimidating behaviour: more serious (96 or 10%) and less serious (82 or 8%)
- Freedom (99 or 10%)
- War and peace (78 or 8%)
- Being hit, smacked, beaten up or hurt (51 or 5%)
- Equality & tolerance (51 or 5%)

Friends

- Friends (670 or 67%)
- Bullying (294 or 29%)
- Play (100 or 10%)

Family

- Family (694 or 69%)
- Parents and parenting (362 or 36%)
- Pets (177 or 18%)
- Siblings (151 or 15%)
- Abuse (99 or 10%)
- Parental separation (88 or 9%)
- Grandparents and extended family (77 or 8%)
- Doing things with the family (65 or 7%)
- Spending time with the family (52 or 5%)

Learning

- School (260 or 26%)
- Education (132 or 13%)
- Homework (56 or 6%)
- Teachers (50 or 5%)

Lifestyle

- Material wants (175 or 18%)
- Sport (173 or 17%)
- Having fun and enjoying yourself (115 or 12%)
- Toys (70 or 7%)
- Hobbies and interests (59 or 6%)
- Smoking (67 or 7%)
- Drugs (66 or 7%)
- Healthy food / junk food (64 or 6%)
- Outdoors / with nature (64 or 6%)
- Boredom / nothing to do (53 or 5%)

Health

- General health (181 or 18%)
- Happiness and unhappiness (97 or 10%)
- Getting into trouble (88 or 9%)
- Sleep-related (53 or 5%)

Values

- Attitudes to self and life (214 or 21%)
- Concern for others (160 or 16%) and being treated well (49 or 5%)

Poverty and disadvantage

- Material needs (408 or 41%)
- Money (148 or 15%)

Background

In February 2007 *The Good Childhood Inquiry* launched the 'my life' postcard to children and young people. The inquiry received completed postcards throughout 2007 and closed the consultation in December, during which time¹, 5,337 children and young people had taken part. All these postcards are available to the inquiry panel in full on request.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of these postcards to inform the inquiry panel's concluding discussions and to highlight the topic areas that are of particular interest and concern to children and young people.

The 'my life' postcard questions

The 'my life' postcard is a colourful fold-out postcard with A5-sized panels where children could write or draw their responses to the following six questions, with each pair of questions sitting underneath one of three headings:

I love...

1. What are the best things about your life?
2. What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?

I don't like...

3. What are the worst things about your life?
4. What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?

I wish...

5. What would you change about your life if you could?
6. What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?

¹ Due to the Welsh postcard being produced later, we continued to receive and include Welsh postcards until May 2008.

In addition to the original, we produced two further versions of the postcard:

- A Welsh translation
- A simplified version with a shorter set of questions and symbols (in Widgit) for use with disabled children and those with difficulties understanding English.

Methods

We sent an example copy of the 'my life' postcard along with explanatory notes to hundreds of organisations that work with children and young people around the UK, including each of The Children's Society's projects. Interested parties could call The Children's Society and order as many postcards as they wanted. As we were particularly keen to engage Welsh children, we sent a targeted mailing to every primary school in Wales with a copy of both the Welsh and the English postcard.

The response

We received an overwhelming response to the 'my life' postcard consultation with a total of 5,022 children and young people taking part. In addition, we received 149 postcards from Welsh children and 166 Widgit postcards.

Taking a sample

In view of the large amount of evidence that we received, we chose to analyse a sample of the postcards to identify the key topics identified by the children and young people.

We took a 2% random sample and organised the topics emerging from the sample into a 'tree'.

These tree structures were then used to code a further 20% sample of submissions. It is analysis of this sample that is presented in this report.

Key topics

The coding process involved categorising every topic that was mentioned in a postcard. If the topic was raised more than once in a postcard we coded it only once. We were, therefore, able to calculate the percentage of children that mentioned each topic and to order the topics overall.

In the analysis section that follows, we explore each of the top 46 topics in turn, describing the various things that children tended to say on the subject and providing a selection of children's verbatim quotes by illustration. We only carried out this analysis for the 46 most commonly mentioned topics, however, and so we have included the remaining topics in a table overleaf.

It is worth emphasising that the submissions that we received are not a scientific sample and are not representative of all children. We have included percentages in this paper not to suggest that these reflect the views children and young people in general but to allow internal comparisons and to order the topics by importance.

Summary of key topics not discussed in this report

Topic	No	Topic	No	Topic	No
Social issues globally	49	Disability	26	Getting on well / good relationships	14
Feeling safe & secure	47	Learning / attitudes to learning	26	Weather	14
Appearance	43	Own room / private space	25	Attitudes / stereotypes towards CYP	14
TV / video / DVDs	43	Cost of things	25	Self-worth / self-esteem / self-confidence	13
Groups and clubs / organised activities	42	Trust / someone to trust	24	Chores	13
Environment / respect for the environment	40	Community / neighbourhood	24	Working parents / working mother	13
Gaming / computer / video games	39	Being with friends	23	Peer pressure	12
Particular subjects	38	I could be....	23	Watching sport / a team	12
Free time at school / breaks	38	Music / listening to music / musical instruments	22	Getting around / transport / living close to...	12
Working / earning	37	Special occasions e.g. birthdays and Christmas	21	Specific physical health conditions	12
Parents getting along / parental conflict	36	Opportunities / experiences	21	CYP in trouble with the law	12
Alcohol	36	Stress / pressure / worry / anxiety	20	Heroes / favourite celebrities / celebrity in general	10
Freedom	36	Respect / feeling respected (for who you are)	20	Responsibilities	10
I wish I could do....	36	Being listened to / having views respected	20	Traffic	9
Going out / socialising / parties	34	Being ignored / left out / not being talked to	20	Pressure to achieve / stress at school	9
Quality of local environment & public space	34	Leisure facilities	20	Diagnosable emotional & behavioural problems	8

Religion / religious belief / belonging / practice	34	Affection & warmth	18	Being encouraged / praised	7
Moving e.g. house & school / transitions	31	Shopping	18	Feeling valued / wanted / rejected	7
Talking / communicating / someone to talk to	31	Having free time	18	Technology in general	6
Fears & phobias	30	Attention / not be forgotten / neglected	17	Workload / coursework	6
Computers / Internet	29	Opposite sex	17	Fostering / adoption / care issues	5
Loneliness / being lonely	27	Attitudes towards physical activity / exercise	17	Sexual activity	3
Testing / exams	27	A good life....	17	Freedom to be who you are	3
Problems / and no problems	26	Fairness	16	Understanding	1
Boyfriend / girlfriend	26	Qualifications / preparation for life as an adult / jobs	15		

Analysis

Family (69%)

Family was the runaway leader, mentioned by almost 7 in 10 children (69%). However, when children said 'family' we coded it separately from when they said 'parents', and when the two are combined the figure rises to 84%.

Children's comments tended to fall into one of three categories:

1) Firstly, just having a family was seen to be hugely important.

"That I have family" 10-year-old boy

[What are the best things about your life?]

"All young people need a family" 10-year-old girl

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

2) Children also made unspecific comments about their own families, usually in a positive but occasionally in a negative way.

"My mum, my dad, my brother, my sister and all my family." 10-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

"my family" 13-year-old girl (in trouble with the law)

[What are the worst things about your life?]

3) Thirdly, some children qualified their remarks, describing the qualities that they considered important in a family, or what it is that they particularly like or dislike about their own family. Common remarks included the value of having a "good", "nice", "supportive", "loving" or "kind" family, one that "is always there for you", "looks after you" and "cares about you".

“My family is really nice to me and I really like that! They always give me what I want. They’re really kind.” 8-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

“a family to love and care about them and to help them with their problems” 13-year-old boy

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

Some children described clear anxieties in respect of the family, including a fear of being rejected, abandoned or feeling unwanted.

“their family being mean and giving their things away” 11-year-old boy

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

“the home being rubbish and people that harm you with their words and actions” 13-year-old girl (in trouble with the law)

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

Friends (67%)

Friends was the category that children mentioned second most frequently, closely behind family. Almost 7 out of 10 children mentioned the fact that friends were important to them.

Firstly, having friends was crucial. Children mentioned the word “friends”, “my friends”, “my mates”, and “their friends” particularly often.

“Everyone should have a friend.” 11-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for children and young people?]

Having more than one friend was mentioned frequently, with children using the plural of friend or expressing this idea in another way.

“To have more than one friend.” 8-year-old boy

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Many times children mentioned having friends in the same sentence as family, indicating that they found them of parallel importance.

“my family. My friends. My house. All things I like” 12-year-old boy
[What are the best things about your life?]

On the opposite side, they mentioned the absence of friends, and not having any at all.

“it would stop them having a good life because they won’t have much friends” 10-year-old girl.
[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

Secondly, children made comments about the quality of their friendships and why they find them important; a friend you can trust, somebody to talk to, and somebody to be there for them.

“lots of friends to confide and talking” 12-year-old girl
[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

“I have one special friend called Helen who is always there for me.”
9 year old girl.

They also mentioned the negative aspects of friendship; when friends are mean to them, when they fall out or “break up” with their friends.

“If I had a chance I will change my friends because they are not my friend they bully me some times and I will like to change their attitude towards me and my life because I am going to the same school as 2 of them.” 11-year-old girl
[What would you change about your life if you could?]

"I would change my life because me and my freinds are forever falling out and I really dont like it" 11-year-old girl
[What would you change about your life if you could?]

A smaller proportion of children talked about spending time with friends. 2% of children referred to particular activities or to simply "hanging out" with their friends.

"Hanging around with my mates". 11-year-old girl
[What are the best things about your life?]

"My friends and going shopping with them" 14-year-old girl

Material needs (41%)

The majority of the comments coded under material needs were about having a home, a bed, clothes, warmth, water or things that children viewed as a necessity for themselves and other children. This category was much larger than the one focusing on children's material wants.

1. Children voiced appreciation of the fact that they had a place to live, food and warmth.

"Having a house to live and money for food" 11-year-old boy
[What are the best things about your life?]

"My family and friends. I have water to drink and food to eat. I have some where to live" – Unknown age and gender
[What are the best things about your life?]

2. Many children expressed concern about other children, and the fact that they may not have the essentials to be able to live comfortably.

"I think all children and young people need shelter, food, drink, first aid and friends." 8-year-old girl

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

“Starving. being thirsty. Illnesses. No clothes, cold. To much heat. Not a good home.” 10-year-old girl

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

“To have food, a shelter, clothes to keep them warm.” 11-year-old boy

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Parents and parenting (36%)

As already mentioned, we coded children’s comments about ‘parents’ and ‘family’ separately although they often covered similar themes. Many felt that - like a family - children need parents, and that they should be “good”, “kind” or “nice”, and not “bad”, “nasty” or “mean”.

“give them a proper mum and dad” 11-year-old boy

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

“F.U.F.G.A. (my horrible nasty ex-dad)” 9-year-old boy

[What are the worst things about your life?]

There was some discussion of the attributes of a good or bad parent, which often related as much to parenting style as to whether parents were caring, loving and supportive. Dislike for being told what to do, rules, and strict and overprotective parents featured highly in these comments.

“Being allways told by your parents what to do all the time.” 11-year-old boy

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

“I would change how strict my parents are and how they treat younger brothers & sisters better.” 15-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

However, a few children expressed approval of boundaries, discipline and “being brought up properly” in comments that were reminiscent of what some adults might say on the subject!

“All children are brought up properly with manners & dignity in a proper family that can afford to have children.”

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

“I like ... the fact i have been raised well” 11-year-old boy

[What are the best things about your life?]

Love (35%)

Love was one of the things that children talked about most when we asked them about the elements of a good life, with more than a third (35%) using the word².

“love and support and people who care for u and trerish you” 10-year-old boy

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

Children often mentioned ‘love’ with no further elaboration:

“Love!” 13-year-old boy

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

When they talked about love in relation to particular people, however, first and foremost it was their family, and on occasion their friends. The same is true for all three qualities of love, care and support (see the following sections), which children evidently saw as provided mainly by families.

“I love my family and they love me. I have friend that love me. I also have pets that love me and I love them.” 12-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

“I wish could make all childrens parents love them.” 11-year-old boy

² Or a word derived from love e.g. loving, unloving, loved, unloved etc

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Sometimes children discussed love directly alongside their physical needs in such a way to suggest that they see the both as essential foundations of a good life.

“They would need love, food and drink.” 9-year-old girl

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

Bullying (29%)

Nearly three in ten children mentioned bullying. Most of the comments were against bullying in general; “No bullying”, “bullying”, “bullies”, “being bullied”, “getting bullied”, “not getting bullied”.

Children also articulated more personal experiences about themselves being bullied.

“The worst thing in my life is the bullies.” 10-year-old boy

[What are the worst things about your life?]

“That sometimes I get a tiny bit bullied, I sometimes feel that no one wants me or likes me.” 11-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Children also seemed worried about other children being bullied, and the emotional effect it has on them.

“People at school can bully them and they do not want to tell anyone about it.” 10-year-old girl

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

“People like bully’s ruin peoples lifes” 9-year-old boy

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

“The way some of them are treated. The way they are bullied. that they dont” have parents and they don”t have a home and are picked on because of it” 10-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Some children wished they could stop bullying from happening.

“I would try and stop ALL bullying!!!” 11-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

“get reed of bulys” 11-year-old boy

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

School (26%)

1. Going to school. A large proportion of comments simply mentioned that school was an essential part of life, using one or two words “going to school” or simply “school”.

“They best thing about my life is when am going to school” –

Unknown age and gender

[What are the best things about your life?]

“not being able to go to school” 11-year-old girl

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

To a lesser extent, children and young people mentioned doing well at school.

“Doing well at school” 15-year-old boy

[What are the best things about your life?]

Some purely mentioned the quality of school as being important.

“better schools” 10-year-old boy

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

“A good school or college”. 12-year-old boy

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

2. The importance of school for their future. Children conveyed a belief in the importance of school and the need for a good education for their future development.

“they have to go to school and they hate it because it wastes their time of playing but it is important for the future of their lives” 13-year-old boy

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

“to have a good education so you can get a good job” 12-year-old girl

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

3. Having fun at school or having more breaks. Quite a few children suggested a shortening of the school day – either to start later or end earlier. A few mentioned having only four days of school. There was also a sense of wanting to have more fun at school, and for it to be less boring.

“Have more fun at school.” 11-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

“there are too many days of school” 11-year-old boy

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Negative (22%) and positive (8%) aspects of others

More than one in five children commented on the negative aspects of others, showing clear dislike for the unkind things that people say and do. Common remarks included criticism of people being “nasty”, “unkind” or “mean” and “saying horrible things”.

“People being unkind to one another” 10-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

“No one being meen. People loving each other.” Age/gender unknown
[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Children also made general comments about “nasty”, “horrible”, “mean” and “bad” people, although they tended not to explain precisely whom they were referring to.

“Tact all the nasty people awy and cepe them awy from me” 11-year-old boy

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

“Bad people of the world” 11-year-old boy

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Shouting, screaming and swearing at each other was one type of behaviour that children found objectionable.

“I want to change the wourld to a nise calm place where people did't scream or be nasty” 7-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

“when teenages swear.” 9-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Being teased and ostracised was another. In comments that seemed to be levelled at others their age, children revealed dislike for being “called names”, “made fun of” and “left out”.

“That people take the mikey and all u cand do is stand their” 13-year-old boy

[What are the worst things about your life?]

“when the boy bot let me play” 6-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Although there were fewer comments about the importance of people being “kind”, “friendly” and “nice”, about one in every twelve children conveyed these sentiments.

“Everybody’s kind, friendly and nice we have kind mums, kind dads, kind brothers or sisters” Age/gender unknown

[What are the best things about your life?]

Attitudes to self and life (21%)

Over one in five children made comments that did not easily fit into any category except one that we called “attitudes to self and life”. These comments were characterised by self-reflection and analysis, and views about how one should be and behave.

The area that drew the most comments under this topic was about “being good” and behaving well towards others. Children reflected on past behaviour, or aspired to “be better behaved” in the future.

“I would like to change everything I have done wrong in the past” 10-year-old boy

“Be a better person” 11-year-old boy

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Some expressed regret about the way they had treated people in the past.

“If I could go back in time I would change the way I treated my parent’s, friends, and other people who gave me support.” 20-year-old girl, was homeless

“I would of not been mean to my friend” 8-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Others spoke about “being good” or “naughty” in ways that suggested they were referring to transgressions that had been defined as such by adults.

“I would take back when I was being naughty at home.” 11-year-old girl

“My attitude with my mum and nanna” 11-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Another area of focus for children was the things that they wished they could change about themselves, ranging from aspects of their personality or appearance, things they were wished they were better at, or such unyielding things as their age!

“I wouldn't be so shy” 10-year-old boy

“My personality” 8-year-old girl

“I would be popular at school. I would also be older.” 10-year-old girl

“Being 11.” 11-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Some talked about themselves in such a way as to suggest that they suffered from low self-esteem or a low opinion of themselves.

“Sometimes they blame themselves for something they haven't done and they won't forgive them-selves.” 10-year-old girl

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

“I sometimes feel that noone wants me or likes me.” 11-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

However, many children took a more positive view of themselves, talking with pride about their things that they are good at.

“Bike riding and Math because I am extremely good at it” 10-year-old boy

“my talents such as sports.” 12-year-old boy

[What are the best things about your life?]

Others quite simply celebrated their selves.

“I love miy sellf” 7-year-old girl

“my free will” 13-year-old boy

[What are the best things about your life?]

Another area of focus for children was the importance of believing in your self, making the most of life and overcoming fears. In comments that were positive and self-affirming, children emphasised the value of taking control of one’s own life.

“Have a postive attitude.” 8-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

“do things im scared of” 12-year-old boy

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Some children described their resolve to put more effort into something - usually schoolwork - although they did not always feel that the effort paid off.

“Trying so hard to do something but noone caring or not succeeding”

14-year-old boy

[What are the worst things about your life?]

“I would revise more so I could get better grades and a better future for my self” 14-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Some children just expressed gratitude for what they had.

"I do not think there is anything about my life that is bad, it is not perfect, but compared to some people I am very lucky to have the sort of life that I do and I am very grateful for that." 11-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

"Being born" 10-year-old boy

[What are the best things about your life?]

There were a number of comments about winning and losing:

"Loseing a rugby match" 11-year-old boy

[What are the worst things about your life?]

"I win games." 5-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

Care (20%)

Children's comments about care tended to fall into one of two main categories: being cared *for* and being cared *about* although when they just wrote "care" it was hard to tell precisely what they meant. Just like love and support, children were either unspecific about the source of care, or they talked about it in relation to their families.

Most of the time children seemed to be talking about being cared *about* and here their comments share a lot in common with discussions of love, feeling valued and wanted, and being encouraged and praised.

"A caring family" Age / gender unknown

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

"For all children to have a home and parents who really really care. Not parents who didn't want children and ended up with them and decided to keep them. People who look after children properly." 11-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Their comments about being cared *for* implied similar ideas to those conveyed when they talked about the importance of “being looked after” and “provided for”, which are categories that we have looked at in their own right. Care and provision in the physical sense was a strong thread running through children’s responses that was not evident in the submissions made by adults. Simply having a home, food and water was mentioned by over 40% of the children that took part.

“People to have someone to care for them” 8-year-old boy

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

General health (18%)

We coded comments under general health if children mentioned being ill, or used the word “health” in their comments. We also coded comments from children that involved falling down or tripping, which was a common response.

Children talked about “health” as being important, as well as “to be healthy”, “keeping healthy”, and to have a “healthy lifestyle”.

The word “health” was usually used within a list of other things children thought were needed for a good life.

“Family, football, friends, health, faith, fun, food, holidays” 8-year-old boy

[What are the best things about your life?]

Or used more generally:

“To be healthy” 7-year-old boy

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

“Having happiness and health” 10-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

On the opposite side of health, children expressed strong negative feelings about “getting ill”, “being ill” or even “falling over” and “tripping over”.

“The worst things about my life is when I get ill. When I trip over.” 9-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

“That I have to go for ops every year” 9-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Some children voiced concerns about their family members or friends not being healthy.

“I would make my whole family and friends healthy” 12-year-old boy

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

“That 4 pepal died in my famliy and my grandad is feeling poor ley.” 6-year-old boy

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Pets (18%)

Almost one in five children wrote about their pets or animals in general. Many times the comments children made were literally a word or two, listing the pets they have:

My cat, my dog, my goldfish, my horse, animals, rabbits, more pets, snakes, my puppy, my hamster, my fish, my kittens.

It was apparent in the comments made about pets that many of the children saw their pets as important family members and friends, listing them sometimes even before they mentioned their family.

“having my lovely pets (4 dogs), one rabbit, one genpig, 8 fish and my family” 11-year-old girl

[what is the best thing about your life?]

“pets, family and friends!” Girl of unknown age

[what is the best thing about your life?]

A few children mentioned the negative side of having a pet. A few mentioned being scratched by their cat, or commented on the chores associated with having a pet.

“walking the dog” Unknown age and gender

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Some children mentioned the emotional aspect of having a pet, to have a connection, unfailing love or somebody that will always listen.

“Maybe a pet of some sort so they can talk to them when something gets you down” 11-year-old girl

[What do you think children and young people need for a good life?]

“being loved but you don’t have to be loved by people pet are the best because you can trust them. They want to be loved. You can tell all your secrets to them” 12-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

A few children mentioned their grief at losing a pet.

“My rabbit died.” 11-year-old girl

[What is the worst thing about your life?]

“when my dog got put down” 9-year-old girl

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

A handful of children mentioned spending time with their animals.

“ride a horse” 5-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

"Playing whih my dog tia playing fetch..." 8-year-old boy

[What's the best thing about your life?]

One child wrote in detail about how having a pet provides an opportunity to develop emotionally and socially:

"All children should have pets to learn about sacrafice caring love patince time So pets ar good things. You kind of sacrifice things like playing out to play or learn it things." 10-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Material wants (18%)

Numerous responses listed words describing what children liked, such as "my car", "my trainers", "my possessions", "my things".

Children mentioned particular possessions that they treasured; "jewellery", "Nike shoes",

"lots of money and clothes so you can look perfect with everything you want like designer clothes and pink stuff.." 13-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

"straightners, mobile, make-up, msn, mum & dad, friends" 13-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

Some comments described their possessions as "good" or "nice; "good clothes", "nice toys". Occasionally they would mention possessions that they wanted to be improved (i.e. bigger or better), such as their house or car.

"Bigger house for family and me" 9-year-old boy

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Children commented both on getting what they want, and not getting things that they want.

"That I get everthing I ever wonted." 11-year-old boy

[What are the best things about your life?]

"Have wot every I wont but like a brats room but I all redy have a brats room" 7-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

A lot of children described the material possessions that they would like, linked to having or acquiring lots of money.

"Be rich, nice cars, big house, be a footballer" 11-year-old boy

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

"I'd be rich and own 10 000 limos" 11-year-old boy

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Children specifically mentioned their parents buying gifts, presents or treats for them.

"When my mum buys me PS2 games and toys" 9-year-old boy

[What are the best things about your life?]

"When my mum and dad buy me stuff." Unknown age boy

[What are the best things about your life?]

A common response that we coded under material wants was the particular foods that they either like or dislike. There was a whole range of foods that they mentioned specifically; "sweets", "chocolate", "food", "peas", "strawberries", "ice cream".

"A house full of sweets." 9-year-old boy

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

They also listed foods that they disliked including “vegetables” and “Brussels sprouts”.

“Kiwis, because the first time I tasted them it was revolting.” 11-year-old boy

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Sport (17%)

Children’s comments included a variety of sports that they enjoyed partaking in including “football”, “swimming”, “running”, “bike-riding”, “skiing” and “playing tennis”. We also included hobbies that involve physical activity, such as “dancing”, “horse riding” and “trampolining”.

“Football...” 11-year-old boy

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

“Playing for my footy team, running for skool. I like all sports.” 12-year-old boy

[What are the best things about your life?]

A small number of children mentioned playing sports with people.

“Playing sport with my family and friends” 10-year-old boy

[What is the best thing about your life?]

Being good at sports. Comments included children wishing they were better at sports, or celebrating the fact that they are good at sports.

“I am good at sports especially football” 12-year-old boy

[What are the best things about your life?]

“to be better at sports” 12-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Sport as a way to stay healthy. Some children would mention sport alongside exercise and eating healthily, with a strong understanding that sport had a positive effect both mentally and physically on their lives.

“I thing what all chilrend need for a good life is lots of sport to keep them fit and well” 9-year-old boy

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

“Lots of sports and helthy food and drinks.” 8-year-old girl

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

Concern for others (16%) and being treated well (5%)

Concern for others was a striking theme running through children’s responses.

“My worst thing is to see peopl upset.” 7-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

In keeping with remarks described (earlier / later) about the importance of being emotionally and physically cared for, children showed real concern about others less fortunate than themselves in this regard. Most of their comments centred on material deprivation and the need to help those in need, such as “poor” and “homeless” children.

“Helping poor children “[picture]” 9-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

“I think poverty is one of the main reasons because it effects many children around the world, even in England where children and young people need our help.” 11-year-old girl

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

Sometimes their comments about poverty were general and not specific to children.

“help the poor people by giving them food and getting jobs for them”

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

There was an implicit acknowledgement in many of these comments that they were more fortunate than others, a point that was also made explicitly.

“If I could I would not change anything about my life because when I think about it I am extremely lucky compared to some people and I feel that I don't need anything to be changed because some children do not even have any parents or a home and I do.” 11-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Children also showed concern for those that are deprived of emotional care or treated badly by their family. “Being abandoned”, “having no family” or “going into care” were important themes.

“When people go in foster care and have no family” 9-year-old girl

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

“get all children that are being treated badly by parents into a good home” 11-year-old boy

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Other remarks centred on particular groups of children that they felt were deserving of special attention.

“I think we should have more stuff for disabled people to do what we do everyday and if you run away there should be safe places but you shouldn't run away!” 11-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Siblings (15%)

Siblings were a major topic of discussion, featuring in more than 1 in 7 (15%) responses. Children gave both favourable and disparaging accounts of siblings, although there were slightly more of the former than the latter.

Sometimes children expressed affection and exasperation for siblings at the same time:

“My little brother” [What are the best things about your life?]

“When I have a fight with my brothers. And when my mum and dad dose not belive me” [What are the worst things about your life?]

10-year-old girl

The comments describing siblings in a positive light tended to be quite general in nature. When asked about the best things in their life, lots of children mentioned “my brother(s)” or “my sister(s)”. Some described how much they enjoyed playing with, chatting to or spending time with their siblings, some wished for another brother or sister, while others just wished they had a sibling at all. There were also a number of wistful comments about being able to see siblings that did not live with them.

“that I am me a twin...” 11-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

“My mam and my 2 sisters” [picture] 9-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

Children made lots of emotive comments about relationships with their siblings that were not harmonious. They expressed strong dislike for “annoying”, “mean” or “lying” siblings, and about being “beaten up”, “left out” or “hit” by their siblings. When asked about the worst things in their life or what they would change if they could, some said simply “my sister” or “brother”.

“Get a new sister and new fish” 8-year-old boy

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

“I could change from being a nasty sister in to a kind sister.”

Age & gender unknown

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

“My sister because she bulleys me” [picture] 8-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Although some voiced only criticism, other children appeared more conciliatory, wishing that they could get on better with their siblings and fight less.

“I wish me and my siter could share” 9-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

There was also specific aversion about being the oldest, youngest or middle sibling, having to share a room with siblings, and parental favouritism:

“being the youngest” 11-year-old boy

[What are the worst things about your life?]

“My mum and dad never listen to me and my point of view, they favor my brother and always take his side and always make out like everything is my fault.” 11-year-old boy

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Money (15%)

When children commented on money, it was usually just a word or two: “more money”, or simply “money”. It was also usually juxtaposed with the idea of being poor.

“To have money and not to be poor.” 11-year-old boy

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Money was frequently mentioned as an essential in life.

“Money, love and care.” Unknown age and gender

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

Some children commented on wanting more money even though they knew they had enough. They wanted more money than what was needed.

“Be more rich - even though I am already” 14-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

“To have £10000.00” 8-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Or about the absence of having as much money as they felt they should have.

“Not having any money for the things I want & need.” 17-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Money was also referred to when children were talking about other children in a charitable sense. It was evident that children were concerned about the welfare of others in the UK and worldwide.

“have lots of money but then give some away” 10-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

“To give money to the poor, make children in africa healthy give them money.” 8-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

There were some comments that brought up money issues within the family. It was apparent the effect that money has on children, and their understanding of how it can produce conflict and has effects on family life.

"My dad needs to give some money back to my granddad." 8-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Arguments (14%) and getting on well

Arguments in general - and with friends and family in particular - were one of children's primary concerns, while harmonious relationships and everyone "getting on well" were a major aspiration.

"My mum and I fight/have an argument everyday when I get in after school about either my homework or my attitude." 13-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Their comments revealed that the effect of these disputes on children often ran deep.

"When I get in a fight with my mummy and daddy and I got so angry."

[What are the worst things about your life?]

9-year-old girl

"If there family or friends or some one they know has fallen out and they have know onen to turn to. Sometimes they blame themselves for something they haven't done and they wen't fergive them-selves."

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

10-year-old girl

Falling out with friends was clearly a common but upsetting experience for many children.

"When my friends get angry with me and break up with me." 10-year-old boy

[What are the worst things about your life?]

"I worry about global warming. Getting up early. Having fights with freinds." 10-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the above, children often wished for fewer arguments or for them to stop altogether.

"That no one augus agen." 7-year-old, gender unknown

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

"no word wars" 9-year-old, gender not known

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

In comments that convey the opposite of those described so far, children emphasised the importance of getting on with others, avoiding conflict and "being friends".

"My family don't argue, everyone gest on." 13-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

"Everyone to stick together" 10-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Education (13%)

We coded all comments in this section that included the word education, causing a significant overlap with schools. The majority of comments were basic comments about the need for education as a whole, to have an "education", "good education", and a "better education" or getting "a decent education".

"That I have a great life and the best family and I have a brilliant education." 11-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

"Everything bad and no schools and education." 10-year-old boy

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

As mentioned before, children mentioned education and school as important as preparation for life as an adult, particularly their ability to earn money in the future.

“Not having a good education to get a good job that pays a lot.” 9-year-old-boy
[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

Support (13%)

Alongside love and care, support was the third major strand of children’s comments about relationships. Especially when they were talking about their families, children tended to discuss support in the same breath as love, suggesting that they see these as going hand in hand.

“For just 1 little thing there parent's to love them and give them lot's of support” 12-year-old boy
[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Sometimes support was discussed in the affirmative sense, with children emphasising the importance of being supported in what they want to do.

“my family supports me in what ever I want to do in my life.” 11-year-old boy
[What are the best things about your life?]

However, more commonly support was mentioned in relation to adversity, as a counterweight to problems and difficult times. Children emphasised the importance of having someone “that will always be there for you”, “to talk to”, “to turn to” or “to confide in”. Sometimes they talked explicitly about a specific source of support, which was usually their family or friends, but they also discussed it more generally or in relation to a more anonymous person, like a counsellor or ChildLine.

“I have one special friend called Helen who is always there for me.” 10-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

“Someone to talk to when they feel they have noone” 13-year-old girl

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

In some cases the child’s own role in seeking and providing support was highlighted. Some felt that children should speak up if they needed to talk, and help others with their problems.

“They cant let things worry them they need to tell someone” 14-year-old boy

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

“I would help anybody who needs help with any problems.” 10-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Having fun and enjoying yourself (12%)

About one in eight children talked about the importance of enjoying themselves. Typical comments included the need for “lots of fun”, “laughter” or “fun” in their lives, for there to be “enjoyable” things to do and places to go, and to be able to “have a laugh” with others. There was sometimes a suggestion that more could be done to allow children to enjoy themselves.

“Try to make life fun for them” 8-year-old girl

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

“In my life I would change to have fun all the time” 9-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

“Laughing” 5-year-old girl

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

Bereavement and death (12%)

A surprising number of children expressed sorrow about a bereavement that they had experienced or fear about a loved one dying. For those that had lost someone, it was usually a grandparent, although some described the death of a sibling or parent with touching candour.

“For all the people in my family to be alive again.”

Age / gender unknown

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

“My mummy past away 2 years ago so it makes it very hard for me and the rest of my family. (do not put this in public please)” 10-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

“When it's my sister Siobhan's birthday she would 've been 7 new she died when she was 19 days old in her sleep at home ... Ther the worst things really becoues I really do miss them I love the very much”

8-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

When children more commonly mentioned the death of a grandparent, their remarks were no less tender. In some cases, they had not even met the person in question.

“Bring my grandad back to life because I miss him. So my gran is not poorley.” 12-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

“My nan and grandad I want them to be alive I never met them.” 9-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

With similar fervour, children voiced their fears about losing people that they care about.

"I'd make shore nowhan in my family dies." Age / gender unknown

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

"That my mum, dad and family can't live forever and I don't know when they will die." 12-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Sometimes children's comments addressed the question of mortality and revealed a general fear of death.

"No one will like to live forever but sometime you don't like to leave this beautiful world. We can't have any choice and this is the worst thing in my life..." [picture] 10-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Wouldn't change anything (11%)

A common response to the question "What would you change about your life if you could?" was "nothing". More than one in ten children said that they were very happy with their life as it is.

"Nothing I have a fantastic life." 5-year-old girl

"NOTHING I love my life" 9-year-old boy

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Play (10%)

Firstly children mentioned being able to play in general.

"I can play and have fun" 5-year-old boy

[What are the best things about your life?]

Secondly comments referred to restrictions on play, either in terms of space or restrictions imposed by adults or parents. Some children mentioned not being allowed to play, or not having enough time to play.

“when adults tell me I cant play with toys” 4-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

“not enough time after school just to play.” 4-year-old girl

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

Other times children mentioned a lack of space in which they were able to play.

“...No were to go and play...” unknown age and gender

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

“Have play areas” unknown age and gender

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Children particularly mentioned liking outside play areas, such as parks or playgrounds.

“lots of parks to play in” 5-year-old girl

“To have a little parks in school play groud to play at playtime.” 11-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Several children commented on being able to play outside particularly.

“My best thing in my life is playing football or sometime cricket or going out to play or go out side for anything.” 9-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

“Playing in woods so that I could climb up trees.” 7-year-old boy

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Comments on the enjoyment of playing outside was often mentioned alongside the restrictions imposed by their parents or adults.

“When I am not aloud to go and play outside” 9-year-old boy

[What are the worst things about your life?]

“Some parentas dont let kids go outsdie and play whith their friends” 8-year-old boy

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

A small amount of comments focused on being able to play with their friends, or expressed upset about not having anyone to play with.

“To have friends and family to play with....” 9-year-old boy

[What are the best things about your life?]

“When people don’t play with me.” 5-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

A smaller aspect of play were comments about playing with a toy, and having something to play with.

“They should have toys to play with.” 4-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

“Playing with my toys” – Unknown age and gender

[What are the best things about your life?]

Freedom (10%)

Freedom was a key issue for children, raised in a tenth of all the responses. Most of the time children talked about having their freedom limited by parents and not being able to do the things that they would like to. Not being allowed to play outside or go to the shops with friends was a common complaint.

Children wished that their parents would let them to do more things on their own or with friends, and be allowed out for longer, later and more often.

“When I am not aloud to play out” [picture] 8-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

“Some parentas dont let kids go outsdie and play whith their friends” 8-year-old boy

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

In other comments, children wished for more autonomy in general to do the “stuff older people do”. Laws governing the age at which you can drive, for example, or buy alcohol were singled out.

“Certain laws could be changed to give people more freedom for example the laws on buying things such as alcohol should be lowered to the age of 14 or 15 years old to have more freedom and experience things and learn for when they are older.” 14-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

“For a good life ... they should do what they want to do!” 8-year-old girl

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

Others focused on the opposite problem: having to do things they would rather not.

“the worst thing about my life is being forced to do what you don't want to do” 9-year-old boy

[What are the worst things about your life?]

“Being allways told by your parents what to do all the time.” 11-year-old boy

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

Some used the word “freedom” in a more general sense, or emphasised the importance of freedom of thought and expression.

“I think all children need freedom to have a good life.” 14-year-old girl

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

“When I have freedom and when people respect my views no matter how silly they sound.” 14-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

Abuse (10%)

Children spoke frequently and at times vehemently about child abuse.

Occasionally they described a direct experience of abuse.

“being sexually assaulted”

[What are the worst things about your life?]

“More free helplines, more social workers to talk to. More agencies to write to when you are feeling low such as samartions. Police to take more action when you are assaulted sexually.” 16-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Abuse was clearly an issue that children were aware of and concerned about. However, since for the most part abuse was discussed in the third person, it was hard to know what had given rise to these comments and on what their anxieties were founded.

“I don’t like nasty parents who abuse their children, people who bully others, rasism, and other nasty things.” 12-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

“I would say growinups to change to not abuse small kids.” 10-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Happiness and unhappiness (10%)

Some children emphasised the importance of happiness, and felt that a good life was one in which they were able to be happy.

“They need love, happienns, money and a family to hug and kiss them.” 10-year-old girl

“Happiness and helath” 8-year-old girl

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

Others rued the unhappiness, sadness and pain present in their lives, and the lives of others.

“Love and happiness. Friends and careres for when you get sad.” 11-year-old girl

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

“I would change in my life my sadness” 9-year-old girl

“All the pain and unhappiness” 11-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Violent and intimidating behaviour: more serious (10%) and less serious (8%)

Children made a whole host of comments about others behaving in violent and intimidating ways, ranging from more minor misdemeanours like fighting and stealing, to violent crimes such as murder, kidnapping and terrorism. Common to these was children’s sense of fear about their own and others’ physical safety.

“Fighting”, “stealing” and “graffiti” dominated the less violent end of the spectrum.

“Less fitting becose eveyone wil get hut” 7-year-old boy

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

“When people rob peoples homes” [picture] 9-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

“Stop peopel dowing grofity” Age/gender not known

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

However, when children talked about fights, which they did frequently, it was sometimes hard to tell whether they were referring to physical or verbal conflicts. There is therefore quite a lot of crossover between this and the section that follows.

Intimidating groups and gangs were also mentioned by some children

“Intimidating people who hang about large social areas.” 15-year-old girl

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

“Less gangsters in my area” 11-year-old boy

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

At the violent end of the spectrum, children revealed a common fear of killers, muggers, kidnappers and paedophiles.

“No more murderers” 11-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

“peverts, RAPISTIST, bombers, pedofiles” 12-year-old boy

[What are the worst things about your life?]

“Stop kidnappers & everybody who do things like that.” 12-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

These comments conveyed a strong fear of being attacked or killed themselves.

“That they are scared of going out on the street and being mugged or something when they have done nothing to deserve it.”

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

“Make them feel safe. Get rid of all the bad people they are scared of.”

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Age/gender unknown

Terrorism was one form of violence singled out by children.

“Stop terrorism, keep the world a peaceful place.” Age/gender unknown

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

The language used by children was often reminiscent of fears expressed by the media and adults in general.

“Horrible things people have done in the news.”

[What are the worst things about your life?]

12-year-old girl

“STOP GUN CRIME AND STOP SHOOTING” 12-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

This was especially so when they talked about the police.

“more acshon of the beharf of the polic”

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

13-year-old boy

“Safer streets, less harmful people and more police.” 11-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Parental separation (9%)

About one in eleven children talked about parental separation and issues arising from not living with both parents. Using language that conveyed strong feelings on the subject, it was clear that children were generally speaking from personal experience. Their comments encompassed a number of inter-related aspects of parental separation, including regret about the separation itself, dislike for parental arguments, desire for their parents to get back together, sadness about the amount of contact they had with their dad, and assessments of new relationships.

“parents, arguments and divorce, step parents” 11-year-old girl

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

Many children focused on the fact of parental separation, expressing regret that their parents had “split up”, “broken up” or “got divorced”. Some were particularly aggrieved that the separation had occurred when they were young.

“Parents getting divorced” 8-year-old boy

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

“Stop my mum and dad from getting divorced when I was so young.”

16-year-old boy

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Children often wished that their parents had never split up or would get back together.

“There parents might split up and the children might want them to get back together.” 8-year-old girl

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

“That my parents still lived together and were happy.” 10-year-old boy

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Some felt quite simply that children needed to be in intact families.

"I think children need parent that are together for a happy life"

Age/gender not known

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

"To change that my mum and dad to get back togheter and I live with them with my brothers and my sister." 10-year-old boy

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Children discussed some of the outcomes of parental separation, particularly how they felt about not living with their dad. Some children clearly had never known their father and wished they could have "a dad" or their "real dad" in their lives.

"I don't think I would wish for anything realy because I love my life. But if I realy had to I would wish for a dad" 9-year-old boy

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

"not being able to see and speak to my dad everyday because he doesn't live with me" 13-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Other consequences of parental separation that children mentioned included links to emotional problems, and dislike for contact arrangements.

"my mum and dad are split up and my brother is always angry" 12-year-old boy

[What are the worst things about your life?]

"Going from my mum and dad like a tennis ball" 13-year-old boy

[What are the worst things about your life?]

In most but not all of their comments on the subject, children gave negative appraisals of step-parents and new relationships.

“my dad has a new girlfriend and loves her more than me and my brothers” 11-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

“make my mum and dad get back together again (even though I like my setpdad).” 12-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Although we coded “parental conflict” separately from parental separation because the two do not necessarily go together, on a number of occasions children explicitly referred to both.

“I would wish my mum and dad did not split up and to stop aguooining because thats wat corsed them to split up” Age/gender not known

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

“My parents aren't together”

[What are the worst things about your life?]

“What I would change is that my parents would never argue and always get along with each other.”

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

10-year-old boy

Getting into trouble (9%)

Children expressed clear dislike for “being shouted at”, “being told off” and “punished”, usually in reference to their parents although this was not always explicit.

“I don't like it when mummy & daddy tell me off.” 3-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

“Getting into trouble at home and at school” 12-year-old boy

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Sometimes it seemed to be the reproof that children disliked, while at others it was the punishment.

"I dont like beng shouted at" [picture] 7-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

"Getting grounded for not doing anything!"

[What are the worst things about your life?]

War and peace (8%)

Children as a whole were against "war", wishing there were "no wars", and declaring that wars should be stopped. There was some genuine concern for the world at war, alongside poverty and crime.

"LESS WAR. No weapons, no crime, help to others, no bombs" –

Unknown age and gender

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

"For fighting to stop in some very bad and unsafe countrey's" 10-year-old boy

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Many times the word "war" was listed alongside other fears about the world that they live in.

"to stop racsism, bullying, vilence, child abuse and war". 13-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Children mentioned terrorism and specific global issues reported in the news.

"Stop terrorism, keep the world a peaceful place". Unknown age and gender

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

“War in Iraq and terrorists”. 11-year-old girl

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

A large number of comments called for “world peace” or “peace”.

“I would make world peace” Unknown age and gender

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

“That knowone has a war and just talked about it”. 8-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Children also expressed an understanding of how war affects them and others.

“Stop pepol going to the Army and Being ill”. 10-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

“To stop young children going to war”. 9-year-old boy

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Grandparents and extended family (8%)

Children often talked about their grandparents and other members of their extended family, sometimes at the same time as parents and siblings and sometimes in their own right.

“All people need: a mum, a dad, a granny, a grandad, an uncle, an aunties, a house, friends, education, a brother or sister, a cousin or two, and support.” 7-year-old boy

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

As already mentioned in the section on “bereavement and death”, a number of children expressed sorrow that their grandparents were no longer alive. As well as sadness about the death of a grandparent held dear, children lamented never having met a grandparent or having none, or only one, left.

“The worst thing about my life is loseing someone that I really love or someone who I am close to. Like my grampy.” 10-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

“my two only grandads have died.”

[What are the worst things about your life?]

11-year-old girl

They also spoke with sadness about a grandparent that is ill or infirmed.

“one of the worst things in my life is that my grandma is in a peoples home and is getting on abit and has lost her memory” 10-year-old boy

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Although illness and death featured in many of their comments, children also had much to say about grandparents that were alive. “Nanna”, “Gramps” and other affectionate terms for their grandparents were common responses to the question “What are the best things about your life?” In more detailed comments, children sang the praises of grandparents they loved, of “being spoilt” and of spending time together. Living a long way away from grandparents and other relatives was also a cause for complaint.

“I wish my nanny could stay at my house sometimes” [picture]

7-year-old girl

However, a handful of children gave less glowing accounts of spending time with their grandparents.

“Going to my grandma's because there is nothing to do there.” 7-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Children also talked about other members of their extended family, particularly their aunts, uncles and cousins. Playing with their cousins and seeing more of their relatives in general were common themes.

“Playing with my friends and cousins.” Age/gender not known

[What are the best things about your life?]

“That I’ve never seen my dads or a part of my Aunties family in my whole life” 11-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Toys (7%)

Toys were commonly mentioned in a list of things that children liked: “my toys”, “toys”, “all my toys”, or describing the idea of having “nice toys”.

“I have lots of lovely toys” 5-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

“not having any toys to play with.” 9-year-old boy

More toys, getting new toys.

“Lots of money More toys more people” 9-year-old boy

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

A few children wrote about their favourite toy: “my toy tiger”, “my teddy”

“My teddy George. I had him since I was 3.” 16-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

“Sophie my unicorn” Unknown age and gender

[What are the best things about your life?]

Children were also concerned about other children having toys to play with.

"They need toys to play with" 10-year-old boy

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

"Having no family and friends because they will have nothing to play with or no one to play with". 8-year-old boy

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

Adults restrictions on children – not being able to play with toys.

"when adults tell me I cant play with toys" 4-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

Smoking (7%)

Children had strong opinions on smoking. They commented negatively about "smoking" and "smokers" in general, wishing that people wouldn't smoke and appealing for people to stop smoking.

"Stop! smoking and drinking alcohol" Unknown age and gender

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

"When people smoke and when teenages swear." 9-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

A large amount of children who mentioned smoking were concerned especially about their parents smoking, wishing for it to stop.

"Stop my mum and dad smoking." Unknown age and gender

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

"my mum, dad, family to stop smoking." 12-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Some children were quite vehement about the bad effects of smoking, particularly the effect it has on those around them. One boy was primarily concerned about other people smoking around them.

"If people smoke and you have to breath it in". 10-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

"Peopel smoking round them so it makes them like it" 13-year-old boy

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

Some children thought that smoking should be banned, or at least that cigarettes were less easy to obtain.

"Banning smoking for good." 11-year-old boy

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

"I think drugs smoking and drinking should be made harder to get at"

12-year-old boy

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Drugs (7%)

Drugs and alcohol were often mentioned in the same sentence, occasionally along with smoking.

Children's comments were usually short, frequently only writing the word "drugs" or "no drugs" and the fact that they were against people "taking drugs".

"STOP DRUGS" Unknown age and gender

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

There was an element of concern about addiction and the fact that drug addiction stops children and young people from having a good life.

"drug and alchol addiction" 5-year-old girl

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

"Drugs stops them". Unknown age and gender

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

A way to make children's life better would be:

"stopping them take drugs and alcohol" 11-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

As with smoking, a few children mentioned the fact that other children's parents might take drugs, and how that would have a negative impact on their lives.

"Pairnt that take drugs" 9-year-old boy

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

Doing things with the family (7%)

Children gave glowing reports of shared family activities, such as "playing together", "being taken out" and "going on holiday".

"The days out and the fun we have." 10-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

"I like it when we all go out together"

[What are the best things about your life?]

"To stay and have dinner together"

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

7-year-old girl

Sometimes their emphasis was on activities that involved the whole family, while at others they described things they liked to do with mum or dad in particular.

"Being with my family, playing with my sister, horseriding with my mum and going out with my dad." 9-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

"I get to go with my dad on my bike and ride around the park and plus i get to play on my xbox with my mum and i keep beating her." 9-year-old boy

[What are the best things about your life?]

Outdoors / with nature (6%)

A lot of children believed that having a garden was particularly important, alongside "spending time outside", or "playing out", and "playing outside".

"My family and my dogs and also the wood in the back garden" 8-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

"I don't like having no garden to playing in." 5-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

Children made longing comments about the idea of being outdoors in the "fresh air", and "climbing trees" in the "countryside".

"To live in natural country side" 9-year-old boy

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

"Playing in woods so that I could climb up trees." 7-year-old boy

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

In a lot of children's comments, being outside coincided with being with friends.

"Playing outside with my sister." Unknown age and gender

[What are the best things about your life?]

"My best thing in my life is playing football or sometime cricket or going out to play or go out side for anything." 9-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

A few children lamented the restrictions placed on them in relation to playing outside. One particular complaint was being unable to play outside due to living in a bad neighbourhood.

“Not being able to play outside, living in a bad area” 11-year-old boy
[What are the best things about your life?]

Another restriction was parents not allowing them to play outside.

“my mum to let me outside more” 11-year-old boy
[What would you change about your life if you could?]

“When I am not aloud to go and play outside” 9-year-old boy
[What are the best things about your life?]

Children referred to the lack of outdoor facilities in their areas that stopped them from “playing sports in the park”. They wished there were more “parks”, and talked about a lack of outside play areas at school.

“That wildlife parks would be near not far away” Unknown age and gender
[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

“To have a little parks in school play groud to play at playtime” 11-year-old girl
[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Diet (6%)

Generally children conveyed the belief that “eating good food” was important alongside having a “good diet”. They agreed that it was vital to eat “healthy food” and avoid “unhealthy eating”.

“A loving family and a balaced diet. 5 a day” 13-year-old boy
[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

“A good caring family and a good balance of food and exercise” 11-year-old boy

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

Understanding that certain foods are bad for their health.

“eat lots of bad food like candy” 8-year-old girl

“There is lots of yummy unhealthy food.” 11-year-old girl

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

“Do not introduce fatty foods” 13-year-old boy

“Fast food, drugs and smocking” 11-year-old boy

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Hobbies and interests (6%)

Children talked about the importance in general of having a hobby in their lives.

“hobbies” 10-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

“They need to have a fun hobby.” 9-year-old boy

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

Some children described specific activities they like doing, such as “shopping” or “drawing”.

“Singing, dancing + acting.” 11-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

“I love my dog and my fishing and my family” 11-year-old boy

[What are the best things about your life?]

One particular child mentioned the fact that her hobby makes her life easier, keeping her calm.

“And my art all this things calm me and help me through bad times.”

14-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

Homework (6%)

Children expressed negative feelings towards “homework”, “doing homework”, and wished to have “no homework” or “less homework”.

“I HATE HOMEWORK!” 7-year-old boy

[What are the worst things about your life?]

There were strong negative remarks against having too much homework, and having especially difficult homework.

“Too much homework. We should have time to relax at home after a long day.” – Unknown age and gender

“The worst thing in my life is having hard homework.” 11-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

“some children and young people is that sometimes they get a bit too much homework bu they don’t have time to take a break” 13-year-old boy

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

A few comments mentioned having so much homework that it encroached on their leisure time, stopping them from being able to relax or play.

“I hate homework it takes up too much of my free time.” Boy of unknown age

[What are the worst things about your life?]

"I think homework stops people from having a good life because they have no time to play around" 12-year-old boy

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

A smaller amount of children mentioned the negative aspect of homework making them stressed:

"I don't really have any really bad things in my life, but the worst thing would be stress from lots and lots of homework" 13-year-old boy

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Boredom / nothing to do (5%)

Many comments lamented the fact that children don't have "things to do", and don't like "being bored".

"Boring days" 12-year-old girl

"Boredom at weekends." 15-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

"Having lots of things to do" 9-year-old boy

[What are the best things about your life?]

Children suggested solutions to their boredom, often including more activities, more places to go and more facilities.

"Entertainment" [picture] 10-year-old boy

"more places to hang out" 15-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Some children commented on the lack of public space and facilities for children and young people in particular.

"More things for children not just adults" unknown age and gender

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

"lack of thing to keep children occupaed" 15-year-old boy

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

One particular boy acknowledged the effect that being bored might have on certain people, driving them towards negative behaviours.

"Lack of fun stuff todo so they turn to bad things like violence & drugs at an early age" – 13-year-old boy

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

Sleep-related (5%)

A surprising amount of children commented on "sleeping", or getting "sleep", "good sleep", "enough sleep", and "more sleep".

"Suffiecent sleep and food and liquid" 9-year-old boy

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

Children also commented on having "a comfy bed", "a nice bed", "bed", "a snugly bed", "my bed".

" a comfy bed to sleep in" 5-year-old girl

[What do you think all children and young people need for a good life?]

Comments were usually based on having to get up early, and wishing they could have just a few more hours sleep.

"getting up in the morning" 14-year-old girl

"That I have to get up at six o'clock in the morning" 8-year-old girl

"getting up earlie on school days !!" 12-year-old boy

"Getting up early in the morning for school." 11-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Children wished they could go to bed later and sleep in longer.

“to go to bed later” Unknown age and gender

[What are the best things about your life?]

“early nights” 13-year-old boy

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

Spending time with the family (5%)

Children often made comments about spending time with their family that emphasised the element of being together over the activity itself.

“Being with my famaly” 9-year-old boy

[What are the best things about your life?]

“More time with porrents” 8-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Being away from their parents clearly caused anxiety for some.

“I don't like it when I don't see my mum and dad” 8-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

“Being away for my mom” 11-year-old girl (South African)

[What are the worst things about your life?]

One boy blamed his father's work for monopolising time that could be spent together.

“the worst things about my life is that my dad is busy with his company and he doesn't have time to spend with me” 13-year-old boy

[What are the worst things about your life?]

“Seeing Dad more often” was the subject of numerous comments.

“I wish I could changed about my life to see my dad more often” 8-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

"I could see my dad as often as I wished." 13-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

Although most of the time children seemed to be talking about non-resident fathers, it was often hard to work out whether they just wanted to spend more time with a resident father.

"I wish my dad was more sensible and I could see my dad again" 12-year-old boy

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

"Dad's stay at home with mum & get paid for it, as this would be his job" 9-year-old boy

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Being hit, smacked, beaten up or hurt (5%)

This topic is closely related to the earlier one of violent and intimidating behaviour in focusing on physical violence. Whereas in the earlier category we concentrated on children's discussions of violence when they were mainly in the abstract, here we look at comments that suggest more concrete experiences of violence, albeit of a relatively trivial nature. "Hitting", "kicking", "hurting", "smacking", "pushing" and "beating up" exemplify the types of comments included here.

"Hitting kiking" Age/gender not known

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

"if they worn't hit" 10-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

"My sisters hit me nearly everyday." Boy, age not known

[What are the worst things about your life?]

However, this is a somewhat ambiguous category as it is not always clear whether children are talking about hurt inflicted on them by others or themselves e.g. falling over. In the case of being “hurt” and “pushed around” it is also hard to tell whether children are referring to physical or emotional hurt.

“getting hurt” [picture] 7-year-old boy

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

“getting beat up everyday” 11-year-old boy

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

Equality & tolerance (5%)

A lot of children’s comments related to people’s attitudes towards difference, reflecting the underlying principle that everyone should be treated equally. Children were critical of those that judge others on the basis of race, age, sex, disability or for any other reason, and celebrated the differences between people.

Some of children’s comments about prejudice and discrimination were quite general in nature.

“Judging people.” 11-year-old boy

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

“When people judge you and your family and other people without knowing the details.” Age/gender not known

[What are the worst things about your life?]

However, most were more specific, with racism attracted a lot of comments.

“Old ladies tutting at you. Terrorism blamed on us muslims.” 11-year-old boy

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

"I don't like ... rasism, and other nasty things." 12-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Age and disability-related prejudice were also felt to be unacceptable.

"if somebody has a disability try to treat them with the same respect as a normal child and try to trust them" 9- year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

"Being stereotyped just because of my age."

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

Some children focused on the differences in people and the fact they should be understood and celebrated not derided.

"That people appreciate every-body and under-stands that people are different in many ways."

[What things do you think stop children and young people from having a good life?]

"I hate it when people don't understand my fashion - Punk - and call me an emo - though I'm not bothered if that is the fashions of my friends. If kids pick on me for being different I don't care because its boring being all the same" 13-year-old girl

[What are the worst things about your life?]

Inequality was the cause of some dismay, while a number of comments underlined the importance of equal opportunities and treatment for all.

"it is not fair that some people is rich and some are poor. No one help me and my family :(" 10-year-old girl

[What would you change about your life if you could?]

"Every one should have equal rights" 11-year-old girl

[What could be changed to make life better for all children and young people?]

Teachers (5%)

One fifth of children who mentioned schools mentioned their teachers, although this was only 5% overall. When they did, their comments were most likely about having a “nice teacher”.

“My family. My friends. Everything. My teacher” 10-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]

“Having good friends and kind nice teachers. Having a good headmisstris” 10-year-old girl

[What are the best things about your life?]