What is well-being?

The Children’s Society has been researching young people’s well-being for more than 15 years, and we have surveyed almost 42,000 young people about how they feel about their lives. It’s only by hearing directly from young people like you that we can actually know what’s going on, and work out how best to support those of you who might be struggling.

Well-being means different things to different people. Happiness, relaxation, health, having enough money, doing well at school or getting on well with friends and family are some examples of what well-being might mean.

We talk to young people about many different aspects of their well-being, including their emotions (e.g. how happy or sad they are feeling), how they feel about different areas of their lives, and whether they feel they have a purpose.

We measure young people’s well-being by asking them.

What is well-being made up of?

Every year, we ask young people questions about how they think things are going, including with their life overall and 10 different aspects of life that other children have told us are important. Some years, we also ask young people questions about aspects of well-being related to feelings and meaning.
Here is what people told us!

We ask young people to score how happy they are with these 10 different aspects of their life using the scale below:

Very unhappy 0 Not happy or unhappy 5 Very happy 10

Family Friends Home Health Time use
Money and things Future Choice Appearance School

Graph 1. Children’s happiness with the 10 items in The Good Childhood Index*

This year, more young people (aged 10 to 17) were happy with their family, their homes and their friends. More young people were unhappy with their school, their appearance and how much choice they have.

It’s important to know which groups of young people are unhappy with their lives – and why – as it helps us to think about the ways we might best support them.

* Over 2,000 children (10 to 17 years old) were asked these questions between April and June 2021.
**Trends in well-being**

Alongside asking about how young people feel about different areas of their life today, we report on changes over time for the following six aspects of life among children aged 10 to 15:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Happiness with...</th>
<th>Change since 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life as a whole</td>
<td>Decreased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Decreased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance</td>
<td>Decreased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Decreased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwork</td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results come from a big survey that follows the same families year on year. The changes shown are from the most recent survey available (2018-19), and so reflect children’s feelings before Coronavirus.

**Young people’s well-being and experiences at different ages**

This year we were able to explore the lives of a group of young people born at the start of the millennium and look at how their well-being has changed over time, and their experiences later in life.*

We found that asking young people a single question about how they feel about their life in their early teens can help with predicting their experiences in later teens.

Asking young people how they feel about their life might also help us to better support them with any difficulties both at that age and in their later teens.

Young people were asked how they felt about their lives at 11 and 14, and about their experiences at 17 years old.

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* These young people have taken part in an ongoing study known as the Millennium Cohort study. Over 10,000 young people took part at age 17.
How young people have coped with the pandemic: One year on

These last two years (2020 and 2021) have been unlike any others because of the global Coronavirus pandemic, which has changed all our lives.

We thought it was important to ask young people how they felt they had coped with different changes over the last year because of Coronavirus. These questions were asked to over 2,000 young people (10 to 17 years old) between April and June 2021.
Overall, most children felt that they had coped (scoring between 6 and 10) with the changes. Young people said that they coped least well with not being able to see family, not being able to do hobbies or activities, and not being able to see friends.

This is important as we know that these things are important to our well-being. There are five things that we can do that are known to help improve well-being: connecting (spending time with our friends and family), being active, being creative, keep learning, and taking notice.

There has been a great deal of media coverage about Covid-19 vaccinations, including whether or not children should be vaccinated. We were keen to get children’s (aged 10 to 17) views about vaccination.*

Around 62% of young people said that they would like to get the vaccine when it is available to them. 11% said that they would not like to get the vaccine. 16% neither agreed or disagreed that they would like to get the vaccine. 11% said that they did not know, or preferred not to say.

We also asked whether they thought young people should get the Covid-19 vaccine in the future. Around 64% of young people thought children should get the vaccine in the future. 9% said that they did not think children should get the vaccine, 17% said they neither agree or disagree, and 11% did not know or preferred not to say.

*We asked these questions before the Government decision on the vaccination of children had been made.
Alongside asking about the impact of the events of the last year, we were also interested to find out how young people (aged 10 to 17) feel about the future.

We asked about what young people thought was important for their own future and what they were worried about.

Thinking about the future

We also asked how young people felt about issues in wider society.

- The environment
- Levels of unemployment (or whether there will be enough jobs for everyone)
- The amount of crime
- Online safety
- Homelessness
- Inequality (the unequal treatment of different people in society)
- New illnesses/pandemics (not Covid-19)
- Refugee and migrant crisis (people being forced to leave their homes and go to other countries due to war, etc.)
What young people think is important

We asked young people to think about their own future and rate each option on how important they were to them.

Graph 3: Thinking about your future, what do you think is very important?

Having somewhere to live was thought to be very important by two thirds of the young people we surveyed, while just over a third thought going to university (if they wanted to) was very important.

We also wanted to know what young people are worried about in relation to their own future and wider issues in society.

Young people were most worried about **having enough money, getting a job** and **getting good grades**.

These were the same worries that young people told us about in 2019.
Issues in wider society

We also asked young people about eight issues in wider society:

Graph 4: What children are very and quite worried about in wider society

The issues that more young people were concerned about in 2021 were new illnesses or pandemics (not Covid-19), the environment, crime, and inequality in society.

Reflection activity

After reading the findings, you might like to fill this space with your own thoughts, ideas or drawings about the topics covered.
Test your knowledge

1. Children are most happy with their families, health and home?
   - True
   - False

2. Children’s happiness with their appearance has increased?
   - True
   - False

3. Children said they struggled most with not being able to see friends and family, and not being able to do their hobbies during lockdown?
   - True
   - False

4. Most children said that they did not want the Covid-19 vaccine?
   - True
   - False

5. Young people were most worried about having enough money in the future?
   - True
   - False

Where you can go to find more information or support about well-being

Improving well-being

There are five key things we can all do to improve our well-being. These are known as the Five Ways to Well-Being:

1. Be active.
2. Keep on learning.
3. Connect and talk with friends and family.
4. Be creative and play.
5. Take notice of what is going on around us.

Advice and support for children and young people

If there’s a mental or emotional issue you’re worried about, you can find information and advice for yourself or someone you know here: childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/Young-People-Guide-to-Stressful-Situations.pdf

You can also contact Childline for free by calling 0800 1111 or by visiting their website childline.org.uk

Advice and support for parents

If you are a parent or carer looking for advice and support with your child’s mental and emotional health, you can contact the YoungMinds parent helpline: youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-helpline

You can call the helpline for free on 0808 802 5544
Every young person should have the support they need in order to enjoy a safe, happy childhood.

That’s why we run services and campaigns that make children’s lives better and change the systems that are placing them in danger.

The Children’s Society is bringing hope back to children’s lives.