

Reclaiming Hope in a Changing World

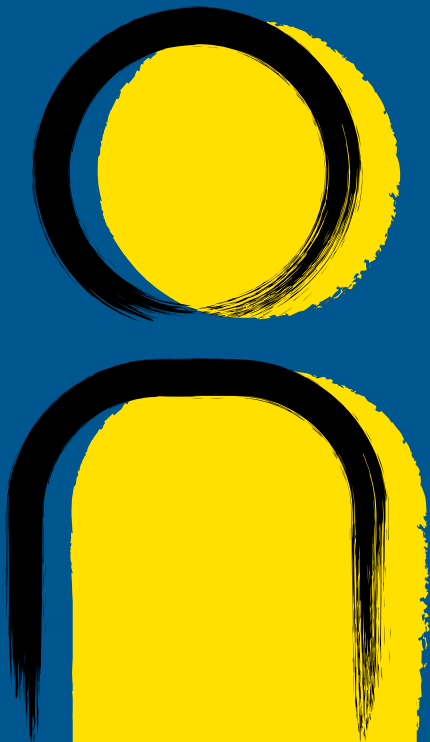


From evidence to impact:
The Good Childhood Report 2025 policy
recommendations for **local government**

**The
Children's
Society**



Recommendations at a glance:



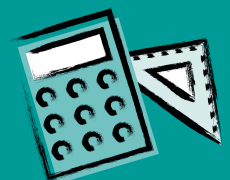
Myself

- develop a local anti-bullying strategy
- adopt a restorative approach to bullying
- commission body image and self-esteem programmes.



My school

- fund transition support programmes
- promote inclusive behaviour policies
- work with Public Health to strengthen Physical, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education.



Introduction

Every child deserves to grow up feeling good about who they are, supported by strong relationships, and confident in their future. Yet the findings of The Children's Society's **Good Childhood Report 2025** reveal a troubling reality: **too many children and young people are struggling.** They are navigating complex challenges around their self-esteem, their experiences at school, their sense of belonging in their communities, how they see their place in society, and their voices being heard.

Our 2025 report places young people at the heart of the conversation. It highlights the pressures they face, from unrealistic beauty standards and academic stresses to the lack of safe spaces and the impact of societal narratives. It also amplifies their calls for change. They

want to have more trusted adults, inclusive communities and meaningful opportunities to shape the world around them.

This briefing outlines the key findings from the report, shares insights from consultations with young people and professionals, and sets out clear recommendations for policymakers. These span a range of issues that impact young people as individuals, their relationships with peers, adults and the community around them, as well as wider societal impacts and their hopes for the future.

Together, we must act to ensure every child feels valued, supported, and hopeful about their future. Only then can we truly overturn the decline in children's wellbeing – for every child.

My place

- map and restore local youth provision
- designate and protect youth-friendly public spaces
- support community based trusted adults.



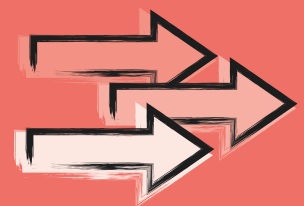
My world

- commission digital literacy and online safety programmes
- use council communications to challenge negative narratives
- address online misogyny, hate speech, and bullying.



My future

- fund life skills programmes
- create routes for youth influence
- promote a range of pathways to success
- embed opportunity and hope in local wellbeing strategies.



Myself

Children and young people thrive when they feel good about themselves and have strong, supportive relationships with those closest to them. Yet too many are struggling, facing challenges both within themselves and in their relationships with others. All young people deserve to feel valued and confident, and to be surrounded by positive friendships.

It's time we made that a reality.

Research

Too many girls are growing up unhappy with how they look – and the trend is not improving. The Children's Society's **Good Childhood Report 2025** shows that over one in seven children (aged 10 to 15) were unhappy with their appearance.¹ For girls, it's even worse. More than one in five are unhappy with how they look, making it the area of life they're most unhappy with.² Girls have been less happy on average with their appearance than boys in all iterations of The Good Childhood Report to date.³

Girls' happiness with their appearance has barely shifted in three years.⁴ And now, boys' happiness has hit its lowest point yet.⁵ This isn't just a statistic or a wake-up call, it is an alarm bell that has been ringing and ignored for too long. We urgently need to understand what's driving this decline and take action to help all children feel better about themselves.

Young people's views

Young people told us they feel under pressure from every angle. They told us that their self-esteem is shaped by unrealistic beauty standards, harmful stereotypes and social media scrutiny. Girls in particular feel the weight of comparison, often left feeling like they don't measure up. Young people spoke about the rise of misogyny and incel content online, which distorts ideas of masculinity and affects how they see themselves – and treat others.

“With social media there is a standard being pushed of what everyone should look like and that plays a big role with satisfaction if you don't feel like you meet that.” Young person

They also shared that bullying based on appearance, race, sexuality or special educational needs is still far too common. Worryingly, many felt that even when they reported bullying, nothing changed. Young people explained that this allowed those who were bullying others to feel like they were able to carry on.

Young people told us there's also a deeper issue of belonging. The pressure to fit in and be popular can drive children to be unkind to others just to secure their own place in a group. This cycle of exclusion and peer pressure is damaging, and young people want it to stop.

“Unkind relationships between many students, students feel peer pressure to fit in which leads to large friendship groups who make fun of others.” Young person

They told us that social media plays a dual role. While it contributes to harmful comparisons and a fear of being constantly judged, it also offers connection and community. Some young people spoke positively about how online spaces helped them build friendships and find support among peers. They want to see more done to tackle the root causes of low self-esteem, bullying, and harmful online content.

¹The Good Childhood Report 2025, Understanding Society 2022/23 data, 10- to 15-year-olds.

²The Good Childhood Report 2025, Understanding Society 2022/23 data, 10- to 15-year-olds.

³The Good Childhood Report 2025, Understanding Society 2009/10 to 2022/23 data, 10- to 15-year-olds.

⁴The Good Childhood Report 2025, Understanding Society 2020/21 to 2022/23 data, 10- to 15-year-olds.

⁵The Good Childhood Report 2025, Understanding Society 2022/23 data, 10- to 15-year-olds.

Professionals' views

Professionals told us that social media has created a grey area when it comes to bullying and peer issues. They feel the lines of responsibility are blurred and no one party feels equipped to step in.

When problems start online but spill into school or home life, no one's quite sure who should take the lead. Schools often feel out of their depth, and parents and carers feel powerless to act on issues beyond their front door. With no clear boundaries, both schools and families are left stuck. They feel unable to offer the support children need, just when they need it most.



Recommendations

Develop a local anti-bullying strategy

- In 2026, bullying no longer stops at school. Yet responses remain outdated and fragmented, often addressing issues in isolation. A strategy led by the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) can ensure joined up action and accountability.

Adopt a restorative approach to bullying

- Punitive responses can push children out of education and entrench cycles of harm. Where appropriate, restorative approaches help young people resolve conflict and can prevent exclusion. It can also ensure young people who are being bullied see action being taken.

Commission body image and self-esteem programmes

- Low self-esteem is a driver of poor mental health, particularly for girls and LGBTQ+ young people. Early intervention builds resilience and confidence.

What works

The **Lifting Limits** programme equips professionals with the skills and resources to help children and young people recognise and challenge gender bias. It offers a range of innovative, school-based programmes that promote gender equality. These evidence-based programmes provide early intervention and preventative work on gender-based attitudes, behaviours, and harms.

The programme's resources are linked to the national curriculum and designed by educators, for educators. This ensures clear alignment with existing curricula and supports a whole-school approach to tackling gender bias.

My School

School and wellbeing are deeply linked. When children and young people struggle at school, their wellbeing suffers. And when their wellbeing is low, school becomes even harder. Education for all young people, including those not in school, should enable positive wellbeing by helping them build peer connections, discover themselves, learn new skills and gain new experiences, and develop hope for the future.

Research

The Children's Society's **Good Childhood Report 2025** highlights a troubling reality – school is the area of life where children and young people most commonly feel unhappy.⁶ Over one in seven say they are unhappy with both schoolwork and school overall.⁷ For the first time, 'getting good grades' is the top worry for children and young people, with over **two in five children and young people worried about this in 2025**.⁸ We must urgently understand this shift and put children's experiences at the heart of education.

Young people's views

Young people told us that school can be a major source of stress, with the pressure to achieve academically having a clear impact on their wellbeing. Many felt that academic achievement is prioritised above other forms of success, leaving some feeling like they don't belong in the school environment.

"The meritocracy of schools is very academic and not very holistic. If you're not seen as achieving ... you're not belonging." Young person

This pressure was felt from both within the school system and from external sources, and it intensifies during exam periods, driven by comparison, competition and the fear of falling behind.

Young people emphasised the difference that supportive school staff can make, especially when those staff members are trusted, consistent and genuinely care.

"Now I've got a great staff member, and they have made all the difference and made it possible for me to engage in education. Basically, it shows how much the relationship with the staff member is so key. I believe she genuinely cares."
Young person

However, young people raised concerns about how discipline is handled in schools. They felt that punitive approaches, such as isolation rooms, worsen the situation for young people. They called for more compassionate and understanding responses, recognising that disruptive behaviour can often be a sign of deeper issues.

Young people were clear to acknowledge the pressure schools are under to support more pupils without the necessary resources. They believed that wellbeing support must be properly resourced and prioritised to avoid it being an optional extra that overstretched schools and staff may struggle to deliver in the way it is needed.

Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education was another area of concern.⁹ Young people felt it wasn't given enough time or priority, and that it lacked dedicated, specialist teaching staff.

⁶ The Good Childhood Report 2025, data from The Children's Society's household survey 2025, 10- to 17-year-olds.

⁷ The Good Childhood Report 2025, Understanding Society 2022/23 data, 10- to 15-year-olds.

⁸ The Good Childhood Report 2025, data from The Children's Society's household survey 2025, 10- to 17-year-olds.

⁹ This is now called relationships, sex and health education (RSHE), however, we have used the language that the young people used in the consultations.

“We had PSHE every other week, he had maybe five minutes to read through the presentation and prepare, he didn’t have time to do it.”

Young person

They believed that integrating life skills more meaningfully into the curriculum could help support wellbeing and better prepare them for life beyond school. Many also wanted the curriculum to be more flexible and tailored to individual aspirations.

Finally, the transition from primary to secondary school was highlighted as a particularly challenging time. Young people felt this period needs more attention and support to help them adjust and thrive.

Professionals’ views

Many professionals raised concerns about an increasingly behaviour-driven education system, one that leans heavily on rules, rewards, and punishments. They felt that these rigid approaches often overlook the complex realities children face, such as poverty or trauma.

Professionals told us that restrictive behaviour policies directly conflicted with the idea that schools are seen as one of the main, and sometimes only, routes for children and young people to access trusted adults and support for their wellbeing.

Like young people, professionals pointed to academic pressure, especially around exams, as a major factor in low wellbeing. They described how the current focus on achievement leaves many children feeling overwhelmed and disengaged.

Another recurring theme was the lack of emphasis on life skills. While PSHE is delivered in schools, professionals said it’s often treated as an add-on rather than a core part of the curriculum. They stressed that equipping children with everyday skills is essential, not just for their future, but for their wellbeing right now.

Recommendations

Fund transition support programmes

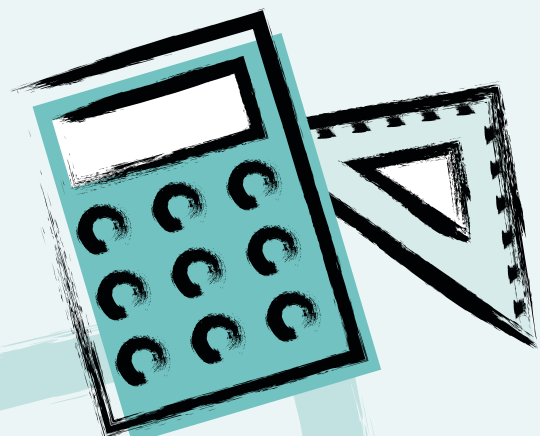
- Vulnerable pupils are most at risk of disengagement when moving into secondary school.

Promote inclusive behaviour policies

- Punitive measures isolate pupils and escalate exclusion whereas inclusive approaches keep children engaged and learning.

Work with Public Health to strengthen PSHE education

- PSHE education and wellbeing support in schools is often uneven, and schools do not always have a clear, shared way to assess need and hear from pupils.



My Place

Children's wellbeing is intrinsically linked to their feelings of belonging in their community. This includes access to support within their community, opportunities to explore spaces for them, and chances to develop relationships with peers, adults and the wider community.

Research

The Children's Society's **Good Childhood Report 2025** found that **37% of parents and carers struggled to afford out-of-school activities in the past year**.¹⁰ Just under half of children and young people said that a lack of money had stopped them from doing something they wanted to at least once in the last six months.¹¹

Young people also expressed concern around crime, which was their second biggest societal worry after rising prices, with 38% of children and young people saying they're worried about it.¹² Feeling safe and a sense of belonging in their community is fundamental to wellbeing, and too many children are missing out on both.

Young people's views

Young people told us that strong, supportive relationships with adults are vital for their wellbeing. They felt that role models, especially those from their communities, can help build trust and connection.

They also spoke about feeling isolated from their communities, and how that sense of disconnection can affect their wellbeing. Many want to be active and involved locally but felt that the opportunities to do so were not always there – including a specific reduction in the provision of youth clubs for young people to socialise.

“A lot more [were] available a few years ago but they are not visible as much anymore. People don't seem to be talking about them as much.”
Young person

They were also worried about the lack of safe spaces to socialise. The young people consulted described a safe space as “knowing you are welcome and you don't have to leave”. They did however point out that what constitutes a safe space can be different for individual people. Young people said safety isn't just about physical security, it's about feeling welcome and accepted. Parks, for example, can feel unsafe if teenagers are treated as a nuisance or told to leave.

They also highlighted how hard it can be to find out where services and activities are available. And while there's pressure to spend less time on phones, they felt there aren't enough positive alternatives to turn to.

Cost was a major barrier too. Young people shared that they may miss out on opportunities simply because they can't afford them.

“If they can't afford things, it also means they'll miss out on opportunities, and will feel left out... The more a person socialises the better they feel, and they can share their feelings, but if they haven't got that opportunity because they can't afford it ...” Young person

Young people want to see safe spaces created and run by young people, for young people, which they felt would make it easier for them to talk, to listen, and to look out for each other.



¹⁰ The Good Childhood Report 2025, data from The Children's Society's household survey 2025, parents and carers of 10- to 17-year-olds.

¹¹ The Good Childhood Report 2025, data from The Children's Society's household survey 2025, 10- to 17-year-olds.

¹² The Good Childhood Report 2025, data from The Children's Society's household survey 2025, 10- to 17-year-olds.

Professionals' views

Professionals highlighted how the lack of universal and early support services, combined with long waiting times, puts significant strain on families. Schools are increasingly expected to fill the gap left by shrinking community support, but many are under-resourced and unable to meet the growing demand.

A recurring concern was the lack of safe, welcoming community spaces for children and young people. Professionals said this absence contributes to low wellbeing, especially for those who feel excluded or unsafe in public areas. This includes both formal spaces, like youth clubs, and informal ones, like parks and town centres. Some groups face particular barriers accessing safe spaces. For example, professionals reflected that multi-use games areas may be less accessible for girls.

Professionals also spoke about how this reduction in services has led to a loss of everyday interactions between young people and a wide range of adults who could provide support. These 'trusted adults' play a vital role in children and young people's wellbeing yet are becoming harder to find.

Importantly, some professionals made a distinction between trusted adults and trusted chosen adults. They felt that while a young person may be told they can speak to a teacher, a GP, or another formal professional, having a wide variety of safe adults in both formal

and informal settings allows them to choose someone they genuinely feel comfortable with. This choice is especially important for young people from marginalised communities, who may seek support from someone culturally or contextually relevant to them.

Recommendations

Map and restore local youth provision

- Many communities have lost accessible youth services, leaving young people without safe spaces to go.

Designate and protect youth-friendly public spaces

- Young people need welcoming places where they can meet without being treated as a problem.

Support community-based trusted adults

- Trusted adults provide support and guidance that formal services often struggle to offer when trust is low.

What works?

Time for young people, Newham, offers emotional wellbeing support for young people in Newham, East London, as well as support for parents and carers.

Young people choose what support they access and when – no waiting list, appointment, or referral needed.

Trained professionals help young people navigate challenges such as managing difficult feelings, finding a sense of belonging in the community, planning for or questions about their future, or other issues they face today.

Embedded in the local community, Time for young people provides young people with a space that is theirs, where they can press pause, take a moment, and get support.



My World

Children and young people have lots on their minds, and the world around them shapes what they worry about and how they see their future. Their view of society matters, as does society's view of them, because it directly affects their wellbeing.

Research

The Children's Society's **Good Childhood Report 2025** shows that having somewhere to live, finding a job, and having enough money were the things young people considered most important for their future. These issues are causing concern: **40% of young people worried about having enough money for their future.**¹³

These aren't abstract fears, they reflect real concerns about stability, opportunity, and belonging in today's world.

Young people's views

Young people told us loud and clear, adults don't always understand what they're going through, and that lack of understanding can make them feel unheard and impact how they feel.

“Adults often misunderstand young people. They might think someone is being rude or lazy, but that person could be feeling stressed or sad. This shows that better communication between adults and young people is really important for wellbeing as they could be massively influential to a young person's life.” Young person

They also raised concerns about the negative messaging they face. Many felt that teenagers in particular are judged harshly, without being asked what's really going on for them, and without having platforms to share their views.

Young people spoke about how wider societal prejudices affect their sense of safety, including how they experience policing in their communities. They also highlighted the impact of harmful online content on their sense of safety and wellbeing.

“Young people want parents to be more aware of what's shaping their self-image online and to start open, supportive conversations at home.”
Young person

Constant exposure to negative news was another concern. Young people said they're overwhelmed by the state of the world and wish more positive stories were shared to balance the narrative.

Professionals' views

Professionals raised concerns about the negative, fear-driven narratives surrounding children and young people, especially teenagers, in the media. These portrayals don't just shape public opinion; they seep into the wider consciousness and influence how young people are treated in everyday spaces. They also warned that these narratives can seep into how young people see themselves, affecting their sense of safety and belonging in their communities. When society views young people through a lens of suspicion or criticism, it undermines their wellbeing and their ability to thrive.

Professionals also raised concerns about the constant stream of distressing news in the media. Young people are bombarded with adult messages about the state of the world, often without the tools and critical thinking skills to process what they're seeing and put it into the wider context. The result being a sense of bleakness and overwhelm that's hard to shake.

¹³ The Good Childhood Report 2025, data from The Children's Society's household survey 2025, 10- to 17-year-olds.

Recommendations

Commission digital literacy and online safety programmes

- Being exposed to harmful online content, hate speech and misinformation can damage young people's confidence, wellbeing and sense of safety.

Use council communications to challenge negative narratives

- How young people are portrayed publicly affects their sense of belonging and shapes wider social attitudes.

Address online misogyny, hate speech and bullying

- Online harms and hate content directly impact children's safety and wellbeing.



My Future

Young people's wellbeing encompasses how they're feeling now as well as their hopes for the future – but they're telling us that they often feel hopeless. The **Good Childhood Report 2025** puts young people's voices at the heart of the conversation on wellbeing, because their experiences must shape the policies that affect them.

Research

Young people told us that the most important aspect for their future was having somewhere to live.¹⁴ That is not a luxury; it's a basic expectation. Every child and young person should be able to look ahead with excitement, not anxiety.

Young people's views

Young people told us that they have lots to worry about, and many feel uncertain or pessimistic about the future.

“A lot of people say there are so many opportunities ahead of you, but still a lot of young people worry about the future.” Young person

Despite this, many are eager to be part of the solution. They want to help change things for the better but often feel they lack the voice and power to do so. Some young people have found ways to speak up, whether by engaging directly with politicians or leading peer consultations as part of The Good Childhood Report. They reflected on the importance of young people being genuinely listened to when they do take part.

“Despite the fact young people don't have much power, they still want to change things in society.” Young person

But not everyone feels hopeful. Some young people questioned whether speaking up makes any real difference, and whether it's worth trying to improve things when they feel so powerless.

Young people shared that more could be done to gather and act on young people's views. They also called for tokenistic approaches to be avoided, so that surveys do not feel like a 'tick-box' exercise and are meaningful for young people. When young people are asked to share their thoughts, it must lead to real change.

Professionals' views

Professionals told us they're seeing a worrying lack of hope among the children and young people they support, and it's taking a toll on wellbeing. This was considered complex in origin, with professionals telling us that there were wider challenges and barriers to improving children and young people's hopes for their individual futures.

They described a growing gap between young people's expectations and their lived realities. On one side, many are comparing themselves to online influencers with seemingly perfect lives. On the other, they're witnessing the struggles of families and peers experiencing poverty. They shared that young people are seeing their family work hard and make sacrifices, yet still struggle to put food on the table. As a result, young people are questioning what the point is.

There was also concern that where young people may see hope, such as connection with others and empowerment of their voice in the digital world, adults shut these avenues down and demonise them. Some viewed this as a missed opportunity to nourish the hope that young people may find in having an influence on their life and the world around it.

Alongside these concerns, professionals also highlighted how fears about climate change and global conflict weigh heavy on young people's minds. There is concern and fear and a feeling of powerlessness and lack of hope.

¹⁴ The Good Childhood Report 2025, data from The Children's Society's household survey 2025, 10- to 17-year-olds.

Recommendations

Fund life skills programmes

- Life skills build resilience, confidence and readiness for adulthood, helping young people manage practical and emotional challenges.

Create routes for youth influence

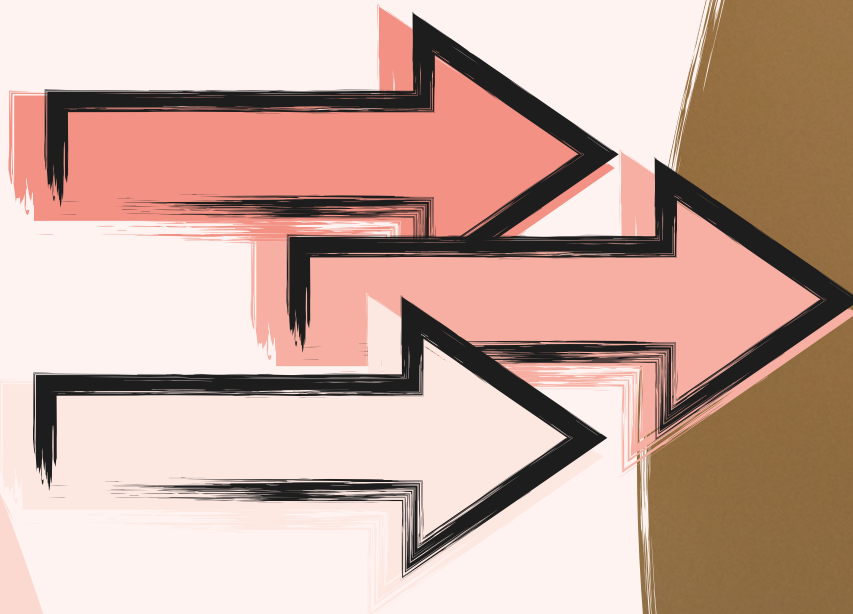
- When young people shape decisions, they feel ownership and belonging in their communities, strengthening confidence and hope.

Promote a range of pathways to success

- Narrow definitions of success can leave young people feeling they do not belong or cannot achieve. Recognising diverse skills and ambitions widens hope and opportunity.

Embed opportunity and hope in local wellbeing strategies

- Hope must be built through real change, not words without action. Embedding hope means making progress and opportunity visible.



Conclusion

Together, we must act to ensure every child feels valued, supported, and hopeful about their future. Only then can we truly overturn the decline in children's wellbeing – for every child.

The **Good Childhood Report 2025** paints a concerning picture. Young people continue to experience low wellbeing, and too many are feeling like they are navigating this alone. For many, community spirit has faded. There are fewer opportunities and fewer safe spaces where young people feel they belong. Negative assumptions and stereotypes are pushing them out of the places they once turned to for connection, and while the online world offers some solace, it is often unsafe - reflecting our collective failure to protect them in digital spaces.

At the same time, a vital rung in the ladder has been removed. A lack of sustained investment in community-based, early support services has placed growing pressure on families and school staff, creating tensions and leaving a void in accessible support for young people. The report details the mounting challenges, stressors and worries that children face. We cannot let them face this alone.

The choices councillors make today will shape not only the services available to children and young people, but also the stories they tell about growing up in their community, and the memories they carry into adulthood.

Local government has always been a place where change closest to people's lives begins. You cannot rewrite the education system alone –but you can use your influence to ensure that wellbeing is prioritised in local education strategies, commissioning, and partnerships.

Acting on these levers means schools can become places of belonging and opportunity, not just pressure and competition. It means rebuilding the community spirit that young people are missing, and creating the conditions for them to feel safe, supported, and valued. It means ensuring that no child is left to navigate these challenges in isolation.

Improving children and young people's wellbeing is an endeavour that must be shared across society and political parties. It requires ambitious, dedicated action at every level – from individual confidence and self-esteem, to community connection, to systemic change. The difference you make today will echo in the confidence, safety, and opportunities of the next generation tomorrow.



Teenagers' needs are being ignored, with those who face abuse, exploitation or neglect only receiving help at crisis point.

We reach teenagers where they are to tackle the struggles they face today, providing complete support that's specific to them, and challenging the government to deliver policies that will continue to protect them. Because a future of hope and happiness belongs to every young person.

Together, we can set a path to a good childhood.



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Report 2025 publications.**

For further information or advice on how to implement these actions in your council, please contact **Regional Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Georgia Power**, at Email: **georgia.power@childrenssociety.org.uk**.

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