

My world: shaping a more hopeful narrative



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

**The
Children's
Society**

My world

For many young people, an uncertain future that's difficult to plan for is a significant source of worry. A constant stream of negative news can make that uncertainty feel overwhelming.

The **Good Childhood Report 2025** found the biggest concern for young people is rising prices and the cost of living. These worries are not abstract. They are about stability, fairness and equality of opportunity.

Confidence and hope are affected by the environment around us: being spoken about negatively in the media and encountering harmful content online is something young people have to contend with every day. Often, when they are asked for their views, they see very little change afterwards.

What the Good Childhood Report shows:

- 40% of young people are worried about having enough money in the future.
- 75% of parents and carers were 'very' or 'quite' concerned about the impact of the increase to the cost of living.
- Teenagers are often depicted negatively in the media and public discourse, which affects how they are perceived and treated.
- Young people are exposed to a constant stream of distressing news and harmful online content.
- Negative social narratives can reduce belonging, increase anxiety and weaken trust between generations.

What young people say

Young people told us that adults often misunderstand what they're going through and that a lack of understanding makes them feel unheard and affects their sense of belonging.

"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 are judged harshly or judged by the behaviour of others. Too often, they are spoken about rather than listened to. They want opportunities to be heard, not labelled.

Young people described how wider prejudice, including discrimination and negative experiences with public institutions, shapes their sense of safety and trust. Many young people told us that they feel overwhelmed by a constant flow of negative and upsetting news and the fact they rarely see positive stories about young people.

They did not ask to ignore real problems, but to see a more balanced picture. They wanted to see stories that recognise their contribution and resilience, that centre hope and community instead of crisis and fear.

What professionals say

Professionals echoed these concerns. They warned that negative media narratives about young people fuel stigma and influence how they are treated, shaping public attitudes and also the way young people perceive themselves.

They also agreed that the volume of distressing content, from global crises to online misogyny and hate speech, is a growing concern. They reported many young people lack the digital literacy and emotional tools to process what they see, which can leave them feeling anxious and disillusioned.

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.

- **How:** make digital resilience a clear priority in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and local wellbeing strategies. Ensure this results in a consistent support offer for schools and youth services.
- **What can councillors do?** Ask what digital resilience support currently exists, who it reaches and where the gaps are. Work to secure sustained funding and ensure programmes are co-produced with young people.

Use council communications to challenge negative narratives

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

- **How:** use council communications to present a balanced picture of young people by showcasing local contribution and achievement. Challenge unfair stigma and create space for youth-led content.
- **What can councillors do?** Set expectations for the tone and language used about young people across the council. Ask how young people have shaped campaigns and ensure there is action on what they produce.

Address online misogyny, hate speech and bullying

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

- **How:** use Community Safety Partnerships and the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership to coordinate education, prevention and where necessary, enforcement, with clear roles across schools, police, youth services and safeguarding.
- **What can councillors do?** Ensure local strategies on online safety and gender-based violence are in place and subject to scrutiny. Ask for regular updates on what is changing, how young people can report harm, and what support is available when they do.

Why this matters

The way young people are talked about affects whether they feel welcome in their own neighbourhoods, whether adults see them as part of the community or as a problem, and whether everyday interactions feel respectful or tense. Over time, those small moments add up. They influence trust between generations and whether we feel a shared sense of belonging.

Feeling that we belong depends on whether we are visible as contributors, rather than only noticed when something goes wrong.

That's why the language used by trusted local voices matters. It helps determine whether young people are seen as part of the community, or only as a problem.

Councillors can't control what young people see online, but as community leaders, you can influence the local narrative by setting the tone in how the council speaks about young people.



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**.

BlueSky: **[@tcspolicypractice.bsky.social](#)**

Facebook: **[@childrenssociety](#)**

LinkedIn: **[@thechildrenssociety](#)**

Tel: **0300 303 7000**