



The
Children's
Society

How to support your child's well-being



‘Parents want their children to be happy and positive about the future. But at times, the huge range of advice from parenting manuals, friends, family and other places can be overwhelming.

What makes this guide different is that it’s influenced by the people that really know what they’re talking about – children themselves. It’s based on interviews with thousands of children about what makes them happy with their lives.

And the good news is that most of it is very straightforward. It’s about taking time to talk – and listen – to our children, showing them warmth, keeping them active and learning, letting them hang out with friends and explore their local environment.’

Dr Miriam Stoppard, OBE

How to support your child's well-being

As part of our ground breaking research into the well-being of children, we have worked with nef* to find out what children can do to support their own well-being and how you can help.

Connect

'If I was doing something with my friends and my family were going out I'd probably want to go with my parents cos you want to have that time with them when you're young.'

Lucy, 11

What we know

7% of young people who talk to their family about things that matter to them on most days or every day have low well-being. But for those who never or hardly ever do so, this rises to 28%.

What you can do

One of the hardest things to do as a parent is to slow down and find the time to talk with and listen to our children, no matter what their age. Unfortunately, the solutions haven't really changed. Shared mealtimes, fewer hours in front of the TV and finding activities that the family can enjoy together will all help to support your child's well-being. The

same is true of making the time to spend with extended family. But it's not just family that matters. We know from our mentoring work, that sometimes having a trusted adult, who perhaps isn't a relation, to talk to and spend time with, can really help children and young people when difficult times arise.

And finally, of course, young people's friendships are vital. Interestingly we found that seeing friends was much better for children than speaking to them either by phone or online. So helping young people to see their friends outside of school, if possible, will make a real difference.

Be active

'I always say after a session I come out and I feel a sense of achievement, like I've achieved something, done something new and mixed with different people.'

Ryan, 13, on kickboxing

What we know

Around 7% of children who exercise most days or every day have low well-being. For those who never or hardly ever do so, this rises to 18%.

What you can do

Young people need a range of opportunities to be active, both in and outdoors. These can be as straightforward as walking, running, skipping, cycling or swimming, all of which are great at improving strength, balance, fitness and concentration.

Group sports are also good for enhancing self-confidence and cooperation and can help support new friendships outside of school. Our evidence also shows that they both work well. Local councils and libraries are usually the best places to begin to find out about what facilities and activities are available in your area. Our work with



teenagers in Cheshire uses sports to help them to develop trusting relationship with safe adults, often for the first time. This again backs up what our research has told us about how developing young people's well-being in one area can also help improve other areas of their lives.

Be creative and play

'I like designing stuff. I like sketching things, copying things – it just makes me feel good that I can draw stuff.'

Antony, 8

What we know

Only 7% of children and young people who learn new things for fun (like music, languages, art or drama) most days or every day have low well-being – this rises to 17% of children who never or hardly ever do so.

What you can do

Young people are naturally imaginative and creative. They can take an object and discover a hundred different uses for it, invent an entire character to be their imaginary friend or produce a masterpiece of modern art with just a crayon.

Sadly, as they get older, it's easy for children to lose this ability. This is why it's vital that they're encouraged to continue with some

form of creative activity. Acting, music and crafts, storytelling, collage making, poetry reading, and visiting some of the wonderful museums and galleries in the UK that offer free entry, are all brilliant ways to get their creative juices flowing.

For children, there's a big overlap between creativity and play. Happily, most children need little encouragement to get creative, and playing inside and out are essential to their emotional and physical development. National Playday have produced some top tips* for parents to help encourage their children to play and their verdict? Turn off the screens and get outdoors, weather permitting of course!

Learning

'It can make you feel like you're in a different world.'

Simon, 12, on reading

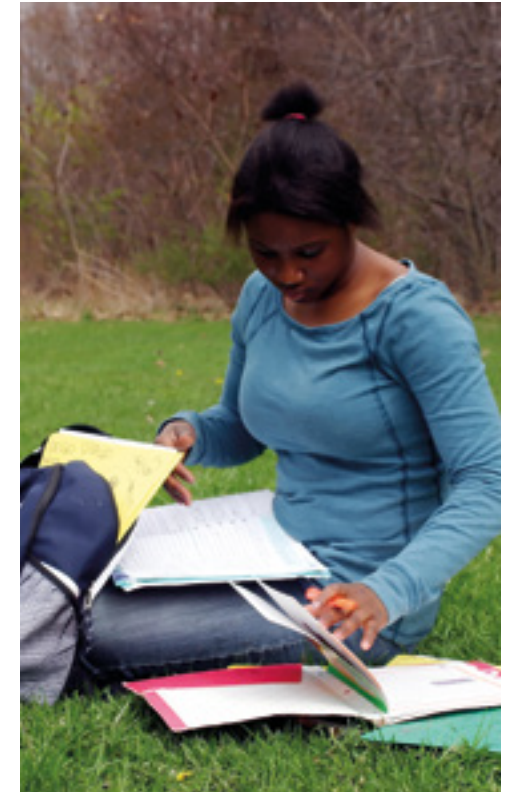
What we know

Again, just 7% of children and young people who read for fun 'most days' or 'every day' have low well-being – this rises to 21% for those who never or hardly ever do so.

What you can do

The young people we spoke with were really clear that learning outside of school was just as important to them as learning at school. It was the sense of achievement that they felt from gaining new knowledge or skills that most mattered. That's why it's crucial that we try to keep as many learning avenues open for our young people as possible. This could include simply passing on the skills we may have, such as cooking, carpentry, DIY, model making, sewing or photography.

The other way to encourage our children to learn is to model the attitudes towards learning that we'd like them to adopt. That's why one of the best ways to get your child to read for fun is to make sure that they see you regularly doing it as well.



Ultimately, young people are natural learners, we just need to try and make their world as large as possible, by filling it with new experiences, cultures and ideas.

*playday.org.uk/playday-events/top-tips/parents-families.aspx

Take notice

'I like listening to music because when I'm angry it helps me to calm down.'

Dee, 8

What we know

Just 5% of children who notice and enjoy their surroundings most days or every day report low well-being – this rises to 33% for young people who never or hardly ever do so.

What you can do

We shouldn't underestimate how differently children see and interact with the world around them. Our rubbish is their treasure, a slug can be a friend, and stick them under a duvet with a torch and it's a whole new universe.

This also means that their surroundings have a real impact on their well-being. So while we'd all like to go on holiday more often, day trips to different types of places can help too. These could include city farms, local forests, the coast, even

different parts of town can all help them to 'spread out' and enjoy a more varied environment.

The ability to live in the moment also turns out to be an important factor in their well-being. So as parents it's important to nurture this quality rather than discourage it. It's not easy, especially when the clock's ticking, but it's good to keep in mind.

Finally, encouraging them to pay attention to their feelings and showing them how to process their emotions in a positive way is probably one of the most valuable lessons you can pass on to your children. We know from our years of work with young people that valuing their thoughts and ideas is one of the sure ways of helping them to make real change in their lives.



John's story

John and his mum had experienced many tough times together and as a result they had become inseparable. Although this bond was a real strength, it also had its downsides. John struggled to make friends and was getting in trouble at school because of his behaviour.

So they approached our mentoring project where John told us that he'd 'like people to see me for me, and not for the trouble I get into'.

His mentor told us: 'John dislikes dogs, so to help him overcome this fear we took my dog to the beach. It was great. John didn't stop laughing and smiling and he loved every minute of it.' He also started attending the project's Friday Club where he made new friends and used his creative talents to produce some fantastic pieces of artwork.

John has made amazing improvements in school and his friendship networks are now much wider.

'I used to rip up other people's work but now I work as a team in class. My attitude has improved and I am not angry'.

The work has also helped his relationship with his mum. She is now working, studying and can use some of her spare time to plan and enjoy activities with her daughter, which she couldn't before. She feels that 'things are going their way for once and The Children's Society can take a lot of credit for that.'

About us

It is a painful fact that many children and young people in Britain today are still suffering extreme hardship, abuse and neglect.

The Children's Society is a national charity that runs crucial local services and campaigns to change the law to help this country's most vulnerable children and young people.

Our supporters around the country fund our services and join our campaigns to show children and young people they are on their side.

The Children's Society has been producing ground-breaking research and resources on children's well-being and what makes a good childhood for a decade. We speak out on behalf of vulnerable groups such as those living in care, or those turning 16 and at risk of missing out on the mental health support they need. By offering therapeutic support, befriending, counselling or advice to vulnerable children and young people in our local services, we help get to the heart of their problems, start to repair the damage and alert others to their needs.

To find out more about how you can help us:

Email: supportercare@childrenssociety.org.uk

Phone: 0300 303 7000

Visit: childrenssociety.org.uk/what-you-can-do